THE WRITINGS OF

ALFRED DE MUSSET

COMPLETE IN TEN VOLUMES

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She examines it

VOL. V, FRONTISPIECE

The Complete Writings of
ALFRED DE MUSSET

A CAPRICE
THE DOOR MUST BE EITHER OPEN OR SHUT
LOUISON
ONE CAN NOT THINK OF EVERYTHING
BETTINE · CARMOSINE

DONE INTO ENGLISH BY

MARY HELENA DEY

ILLUSTRATIONS BY

C. DELORT

VOLUME FIVE

REVISED EDITION

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

VOLUME FIVE

She examines it . . . . . *Frontispiece*

FACING PAGE

"Aren't you tidy and smart looking" 69

"Very strange with your memory" 121

She allows the King to kiss her brow 233

A CAPRICE

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

CHARACTERS

M. de Chavigny. Mathilde.

Madame de Léry.

Scene I

(*Mathilde's room.*)

Mathilde (*alone, sewing*). One more stitch and I shall have finished. (*She rings; a servant enters*). Has any one arrived from Janisset's?

Servant. No, madame, not yet.

Math. This is provoking; hasten and tell them to come at once. (*The servant goes out.*) I shall have to take the first thing I can get; it is now eight o'clock; and he is dressing for the evening; I am sure he will come before it is ready. That will delay it another day. (*She rises.*) Making purses as a surprise for one's husband does very well for romantic young people, the first year of married life! What would Madame de Léry say if she knew it? And what will he think. Undoubtedly he will laugh at the mystery in which I have shrouded the affair, but will not laugh at the gift. But why all this mystery? I am sure I do not know; it seems to me I could

not have worked so well in his presence; it would look as though I were saying, "See how much I think of you!" There would have been in the thought something bordering on a reproach, while in showing him my little piece of handiwork completed he will say that I have thought of him.

Servant (*returning with a package*). This just arrived from the jeweler.

Math. At last! (*She sits down again.*) Let me know when M. de Chavigny arrives. (*Exit servant.*) Now, my dear little purse, we are ready to make your last toilet. Let us see if you will not be something of a coquette, arrayed in all this finery. Not so bad. Now I think you ought to be cordially welcomed. You will speak of all the pleasure I have taken in making you, all the care bestowed on your little person. You are not expected, mademoiselle. You were not fit to be seen until you had donned your best. Will you have a kiss for your pains? (*She kisses the purse, then checks herself.*) Poor little thing! You are not worth much; you would not sell for two louis. Why should I feel sad at the idea of parting from you? Did I not try to finish you as soon as possible? Ah! the beginning was better than the end. And I have known you only fifteen days; is it possible? I fear we are going to be late, my little one. Some one is coming; I believe it is he; he still loves me.

Servant (*entering*). Madame, here is the count.

Math. Goodness! I have only one ribbon in place, and I have forgotten the other. How stupid! Let him wait a minute, just one minute, in the parlor; quick, before he enters . . .

Servant. Here he comes, madame.

(*Exit. Mathilde hides the purse.*)

Scene II

(*Mathilde. Chavigny.*)

Chavigny. Good evening, my dear; am I disturbing you?

(*He sits down.*)

Math. Disturbing me, Henry? What a question!

Chav. You appear to be troubled about something. When I enter your room, I always forget that I am your husband, and I open the door too abruptly.

Math. Now that is unkind, but as it is also an evidence that you love me, I willingly pardon you. (*She kisses him.*) What are you thinking of, my dear, when you forget that you are my husband?

Chav. That I am your lover, my beauty. Am I mistaken?

Math. You are both lover and friend.

(*Aside.*) I have a mind to give him the purse just as it is.

Chav. What dress is that you have on? You are not going out then?

Math. No; I would like . . . I thought that perhaps . . .

Chav. What did you think?

Math. You are going to the ball? You are looking so well!

Chav. Indeed! I do not know whether it is my fault or the tailor's, but I have lost my soldierly bearing.

Math. Wretch! You have forgotten me, admiring yourself in the glass!

Chav. Bah! Of whom could I be thinking, if not of you? Do you think I am going to the ball this evening to dance? I assure you it is a bore, and I am going merely from a sense of duty.

Math. Well, in that case remain with me. We shall be alone, and I will tell you . . .

Chav. It seems to me the clock is gaining time; it can not be so late.

Math. No one goes to the ball at such an hour as this, no matter what may be said of the clock. We have just come from the table.

Chav. I have ordered the carriage; I have a call to make.

Math. Ah! that is different; I—I did not know . . . I supposed that . . .

Chav. Well?

Math. I supposed that after what you said . . . But the clock is right; it is only eight. Spare me just a moment of your time. I have a little surprise for you.

Chav. (*rising*). You know, my dear, that I allow you every liberty, and you go out whenever you wish. It is only right that you should accord me the same freedom. What surprise have you prepared for me?

Math. Nothing at all, I assure you. I did not say anything about a surprise.

Chav. Then I was mistaken; I thought I heard you say something about a surprise. Have you those Strauss waltzes there? Let me take them, if you are not using them.

Math. Here they are; do you want them now?

Chav. Yes, if it is not too much trouble. I want to loan them to a friend for a few days.

Math. Is it for Madame de Blainville?

Chav. (*taking the waltzes*). Why do you mention Madame de Blainville's name?

Math. I? I did not say anything about Madame de Blainville.

Chav. This time I am sure I am not mistaken. (*Sitting down.*) What did you say about Madame de Blainville?

Math. I thought perhaps my waltzes were for her.

Chav. And why did you think so?

Math. Why, because—because she admires them.

Chav. Yes, and so do I, and you too, I think. There is one in particular; how does it go? I have forgotten . . .

Math. I do not know which one you refer to.

(*She sits down and plays.*)

Chav. That is the one. It is charming, divine, and you play it like an angel; or better still, you play it like an accomplished dancer.

Math. Do I play it as well as she, Henry?

Chav. Who? Madame de Blainville? You are still harping on that name?

Math. Oh! not at all. If I were a man, that woman would never turn my head.

Chav. You are right, madame. No man should allow his head to be turned either by a woman or a waltz.

Math. Do you intend to play cards this evening?

Chav. Why, my dear, what put that idea in your head? A man may gamble, but he never sets out with the deliberate intention of doing so.

Math. Have you any money in your pocket?

Chav. Perhaps I have. Do you want some?

Math. I? Gracious! What should I want of money? Dear Henry, you are so noble and kind. Do you remember one day, when I had

a little debt to pay, and you complained of having no purse?

Chav. What of it? Yes, it is annoying to go out somewhere and find your pockets empty . . .

Math. Would you like to have a red purse with a black clasp?

Chav. No, I do not like red. By the way, that reminds me that I have just had a purse given to me, a present I received only yesterday. What do you think of it? (*He draws it from his pocket.*) Is it the proper thing?

Math. Let me see it.

Chav. Here it is.

(*He hands her the purse; she examines it, then returns it.*)

Math. It is very pretty. What color is it?

Chav. (*laughing*). What color is it? That's a fine question to ask.

Math. Oh! I mean . . . I was wondering who gave it to you.

Chav. Ah! that is rich! 'Pon my word, your curiosity is delicious.

Servant (*announcing a caller*). Madame de Léry.

Math. I gave orders that I was not at home.

Chav. No, no; let her come right in. Why not receive her?

Math. Very well, sir; but that purse, aren't you going to tell me who made it?

Scene III

(*Mathilde, Chavigny, Madame de Léry, in evening dress.*)

Chav. Come in, madame; pray, be seated; you have come quite apropos. Mathilde has just committed a blunder that is too good to keep. I was showing this purse . . .

Madame de Léry. Why, how pretty! Let me see it.

Chav. I was showing her this purse; she examined it carefully, turned it over and over in her hand, then returned it to me, and what do you suppose she asked me? She wanted to know what color it was.

M. de L. Why, it is blue.

Chav. Yes, it is blue, there is no doubt about that; and that is just the joke of it. Can you imagine any one asking such a question?

M. de L. A very good joke, I must say. Good evening, dear Mathilde; are you going to the embassy to-night?

Math. No, I intend to remain at home.

Chav. But why don't you laugh at my story?

M. de L. But tell me, who made that purse? Ah! I recognize it. It came from Madame de Blainville. Why, what is the trouble?

Chav. (*bruskly*). How do you recognize it, if you please?

M. de L. By its color. I have watched it dragging along for years; in fact, it was seven years in process of construction, and you may judge for yourself whether it has not changed its destination more than once during that time. It has been intended for three different people to my knowledge. You possess a treasure, Monsieur de Chavigny; that purse is a veritable heirloom.

Chav. One might suppose there was only one purse in the world.

M. de L. Well, there is only one blue purse. In the first place, blue is very distasteful to me; I can not bear it. Whenever I see anything blue, I never forget it. I love lilac as much as I detest blue.

Math. It is the color of constancy.

M. de L. Bah! It is the color of wigmakers. Well, I just dropped in on my way to the ball, and it is so crowded at the embassy that one has to go early. Why do you stay away? I would not miss it for the world.

Math. I had not thought of going, and it is too late now.

M. de L. You have plenty of time. Come, my dear, I am going to ring for a servant. We will put Monsieur de Chavigny out of the room, and I will help you dress. My carriage is at the door, and we shall arrive in good time.

Math. No, you must excuse me this evening.

M. de L. Is that your final decision? Come, Monsieur de Chavigny, make your wife obey me.

Chav. (*dryly*). I never meddle with her affairs.

M. de L. Oh! yes, I understand; you are so fond of blue! Well, do you know what I am going to do? Give me some tea, and I will spend the evening here.

Math. How good of you, dear Ernestine! No, I am unwilling to deprive you of the pleasure of attending the ball. Go to the embassy, and dance part of the evening, and then return here at twelve, if you will; we will have a little talk all by ourselves, since Monsieur de Chavigny abandons us.

Chav. I? Not at all; I do not know that I shall go out.

M. de L. Very well! It is agreed! I leave you. By the way, have you heard of my latest misfortune? I have been robbed.

Math. Robbed? What do you mean?

M. de L. Four dresses, my dear; four lovely dresses from London; lost while going through the custom inspection. If you had seen them, you would have wept. There was one Persian and one pure colored silk; such dresses will never be made again.

Math. I am so sorry! Were they confiscated?

M. de L. Oh, no! If that were all, I would make such a fuss about it that they would have to return them, for that would be as bad as murder. So here I am without a thing to wear all summer. Just think of it! They rummaged about in my trunks at such a furious rate that they tore three holes in my dresses large enough to put your finger through. That is what was brought to me for breakfast yesterday.

Chav. They were not blue, were they?

M. de L. No, they were not. Adieu, my dear. Bonsoir, Mr. Blue . . . If you will kindly conduct me to my carriage, I will promise to return.

Scene IV

(*Chavigny. Mathilde.*)

Chav. What a madcap she is! I must say you choose your friends well.

Math. It was you who insisted on receiving her.

Chav. I will wager that you think Madame de Blainville made my purse.

Math. No, not if you deny it.

Chav. I am sure you think so.

Math. And why are you so sure?

Chav. Because I know your disposition; Madame de Léry is your oracle; you believe everything she says.

Math. You give me credit for more credulity than I possess.

Chav. And I would much prefer to have you frank and open about it.

Math. But if I do not think so, you surely do not expect me to pretend that I do, merely to appear sincere?

Chav. I tell you, you do think so; it is written on your face.

Math. If it will give you any pleasure, I will say that I do think so.

Chav. You do think so? And suppose it is true, then what?

Math. Nothing, and that is why I do not understand your motive in denying it.

Chav. I do not deny it; it is the truth. (*He rises.*) Well, I shall return soon and take tea with your friend.

Math. Henry, do not leave me thus.

Chav. Why do you say *thus?* Have we quarreled? I do not see what there is to get excited about; some one makes a purse for me, and I accept it; you ask me who made it, and I tell you. Nothing could be further from a quarrel than that.

Math. And if I should ask you for that purse, would you give it to me?

Chav. Perhaps. What good would it do you?

Math. Never mind; I ask you to give it to me.

Chav. You do not wish to carry it, do you? I would like to know what you want to do with it.

Math. I want to carry it.

Chav. What a joke! You carry a purse made by Madame de Blainville?

Math. Why not? You carry it willingly enough.

Chav. For a very good reason; I am not a woman.

Math. Very well, if I must not carry it, I will throw it in the fire.

Chav. Ah! at last you are sincere. Very well, I will be equally sincere, and tell you that I intend to keep it.

Math. You surely have the right to do so, but I confess that I think it is cruel in you to carry a purse that every one knows was given you by another woman.

Chav. Every one will say it is a trophy.

Math. Listen to me, I beg of you, and give me your hand. (*She kisses him.*) Do you love me, Henry? Answer me.

Chav. I love you and I listen to you.

Math. I assure you I am not jealous, but if you will give me that purse, I will thank you with all my heart. I propose a little exchange, and I assure you, you shall not lose by it.

Chav. Let me see what you offer in exchange; what is it?

Math. I am going to tell you, if you will be patient; but if you will give me the purse first, upon my honor, you will make me very happy.

Chav. No, not on those terms.

Math. Come, Henry, I ask it as a favor.

Chav. No.

Math. See, I implore you on bended knee.

Chav. Rise, Mathilde, I beg of you; you know I do not like such scenes. I do not like to see any one kneel under any circumstances, and I see no occasion for it now. You ought not to insist on the gratification of a childish whim; if you are serious, I will throw that purse into the fire myself. Come, get up, and let us say no more about it. Adieu, for this evening; I shall return.

Scene V

Math. (*alone*). Since I can not get that one, I will burn the other. (*She goes to the secretary and takes out her purse.*) Poor little thing, let me kiss you. Do you remember what I told you? We are too late; he does not care for you, nor for me either. (*She approaches the fireplace.*) How foolish it is to dream! Dreams never come true. What is the cause of that strange attraction, that irresistible charm that attaches to a cherished idea? Why do we take such pleasure in fondling it, in executing it in secret? And

what is the result? Tears! How pitiless is chance! What precautions, what prayers for the gratification of the slightest wish, the indulgence of the most childish whim! Yes, he was right; it was very childish in me, but my little surprise was so dear to me. And he, too proud or too unfaithful, would not grant me an indulgence that would have cost him so little. Ah! he no longer loves me. He loves you, Madame de Blainville. (*She weeps.*) Well, I must stop thinking about it. I shall throw this miserable toy into the fire; if I had given it to him to-night, he would probably have lost it to-morrow. Ah! yes, he would have left my purse here or there or anywhere, while he carefully preserved the other! How proudly he drew it from his pocket and flaunted it in my face! How complacently he threw it on the table to hear the gold it contained jingle! Wretch that I am, I am jealous! That was all I needed to make me hate him! (*She prepares to throw the purse into the fire, then checks herself.*) But what have you done? Why destroy you, poor bauble, which these hands have fashioned? It was not your fault; you shared my hopes and fears. Your fresh color did not leave you during that cruel scene; you are pretty, and I love you; you represent fifteen days of my life. Ah! no, the hand which created you shall not destroy you; it shall preserve you and keep you as a memento of happy days. You

shall lie on my heart, and you shall be at the same time a good and an evil omen; you shall remind me of my love for him, his cruelty, his caprices; and,—who knows?—concealed in my bosom, he will perhaps return to find you there.

(*She sits down and prepares to attach the missing ribbon.*)

Scene VI

(*Mathilde. Madame de Léry.*)

M. de L. (*behind the scenes*). No one here! What does it mean? Why, one might as well be in a deserted mill. (*She opens the door, and begins to announce herself.*) Madame de Léry! (*She enters; Mathilde rises.*) Good evening again, my dear; where are your servants? I have been looking everywhere for some one. Ah! I am tired out.

(*She sits down.*)

Math. Pray, remove your furs.

M. de L. In a moment; I am freezing now. Do you like this fox skin? It is said to be an African marten, but I am sure, I know nothing about it. M. de Léry brought it from Holland. I think it is hideous, and I intend to wear it a few times out of politeness, and then give it to Ursula.

Math. A chambermaid could not wear that.

M. de L. That is so; well, I shall make a little rug out of it.

Math. Was the ball fine?

M. de L. Ah! that ball! But I did not go. You would never guess what happened to me.

Math. You did not go to the ball?

M. de L. Yes, I went, but I did not enter. But it was too funny. Just think of it! People standing in line . . . in line . . . (*She bursts out laughing.*) Do you enjoy getting in a crowd?

Math. No, and I do not like to see the carriages wedged together in the street.

M. de L. It is terrible when one is alone. I shouted to the coachman to drive on, but he could not budge. I was so angry I had a good notion to get up on the box and drive myself. I assure you I would have forced the horses right through the crowd. It was very disagreeable, I can tell you; and then it was raining in torrents. But I amused myself for half an hour watching the people splashing about in the mud. That is the way I attended the ball. This fire feels good.

(*She takes off her furs. Mathilde rings. A servant enters.*)

Math. The tea.

(*The servant goes out.*)

M. de L. Monsieur de Chavigny has gone out?

Math. Yes, I think he has gone to the ball, and he will be more persevering than you were.

M. de L. Between you and me, I think he dislikes me.

Math. Oh! no, you are mistaken, I assure you; he has told me a hundred times that he considers you one of the prettiest women in Paris.

M. de L. Indeed? That was very polite in him. But I do not deserve his ill will, for I like him very much. Have you a pin?

Math. You have one beside you.

M. de L. That Palmire makes dresses without shoulders; one feels as though the whole thing was about to slip off. Did she make those sleeves of yours?

Math. Yes.

M. de L. Very pretty, very pretty, indeed. There is nothing flat and ugly about those sleeves. But unless one is large and stout, one is apt to look like a grasshopper, with a large body and little feet.

Math. I like the comparison.

(*The tea is brought in.*)

M. de L. Why, just look at Mademoiselle Saint-Ange. And every one goes into ecstasies over the Marchioness d'Ermont; as for me, I think she looks like a gibbet. She has a beautiful head, I admit, but it is the head of a madonna on the end of a stick.

Math. (*laughing*). Shall I give you some tea, my dear?

M. de L. Nothing but some warm water, with just a suspicion of tea and a drop of milk.

Math. (*pouring the tea*). Are you going to Madame d'Egly's to-morrow? I will take you, if you like.

M. de L. Ah! Madame d'Egly! She is another with her curls and her slender limbs; she looks like one of these brooms used for sweeping away cobwebs. (*She drinks.*) But, of course, I shall go. No, I can not go; I am going to a concert.

Math. It is true, she is rather queer.

M. de L. Look at me, please.

Math. Why?

M. de L. Look me in the face frankly.

Math. Why, what do you find so strange about me?

M. de L. Your eyes are red, you have been weeping, that is as plain as day. What has happened, my dear Mathilde?

Math. Nothing, I assure you. What do you think has happened?

M. de L. I do not know, but you have been crying; I disturb you; I must go.

Math. No, I beg of you, remain.

M. de L. Do you mean it? I remain if you do, but you must tell me your trouble. (*Mathilde shakes her head.*) No? Then I shall go, for

you must know that if I can be of no service to you, I may be in the way.

Math. Remain; your presence is good for me, your conversation amuses me, and if I had anything on my mind, your cheerful humor would drive it away.

M. de L. How good of you to say so. Perhaps you think me light-headed; no one is more serious than I when serious matters are to be discussed. I do not understand why any one should trifle with the affections of the heart, and for that reason I am sometimes accused of being deficient in sympathy by those who are disposed to make light of such matters. I know what it is to suffer; I learned that sad lesson at an early age. I also know what it is to tell one's sorrows to another. If your grief is of such a nature that it can be confided to me, speak freely; it is not curiosity which impels me to ask you to share your sorrow with me.

Math. I believe you are true and sincere, but I hope you will excuse me if I refuse to divulge my secret.

M. de L. Ah! I have it! It is the blue purse. I made a stupid blunder in mentioning Madame de Blainville's name. I thought of it when I took my leave. Has M. de Chavigny been paying court to her? (*Mathilde rises, and being unable to reply, turns aside and wipes her eyes with her handkerchief.*) Is it possible? (*A*

long silence. Mathilde walks up and down, and then sits down at the other end of the room. Madame de Léry seems to reflect. She rises and approaches Mathilde, who holds out her hand to her.) You know, my dear, the dentists tell us to cry when it hurts. I tell you to weep, shed tears, both bitter and sweet, for tears are a consolation.

Math. Ah! I am so unhappy!

M. de L. But such a thing is incredible! It is not possible that he loves Madame de Blainville; she is a coquette, and has neither wit nor beauty. She is not worth your little finger; no one forsakes an angel for such a fury.

Math. (*sobbing*). I am sure he loves her, I am sure of it.

M. de L. No, my child, it is out of the question; it is a caprice, a whim. I know M. de Chavigny better than you think; he may be thoughtless at times, but he is not bad. Did you weep in his presence?

Math. Oh! no, never!

M. de L. You were wise; he would have been pleased to see you shed tears.

Math. Pleased?

M. de L. Yes, pleased. I have not lived twenty-five years for nothing. How did it all come about?

Math. Why . . . I hardly know . . .

M. de L. Speak. Are you afraid of me? I

want to prove that I am worthy of your confidence, and I am willing to give you proof of mine. Question me and see if I tell you the truth.

Math. You are my best friend; I shall tell you everything, for I know I can trust you. It is nothing very serious, as you shall see. I have been preparing a little surprise for M. de Chavigny, a little purse, and I was about to offer it to him to-day; for the last fifteen days I have seen very little of him; he has been spending his time with Madame de Blainville. In offering him that purse I hoped to remind him that he had been neglecting me, but at the very moment I was going to give him my purse he drew another from his pocket.

M. de L. Why, there is nothing to cry about in that.

Math. But I was so stupid as to ask him for that other purse.

M. de L. Ah! that was not diplomatic.

Math. No, Ernestine, and he refused to give it to me . . . and then . . . I am ashamed to confess . . .

M. de L. And then?

Math. Then I begged for it on my knees. I wanted him to make a little sacrifice for me, and I would have given him my purse in exchange for his. I begged him . . .

M. de L. And he refused; that is taken for

granted. Poor child! He is not worthy of you.

Math. Oh! no, do not say that!

M. de L. You are right; I express myself poorly. He is worthy of you, and you love him, but he is a man and proud. What a pity! Where is your purse?

Math. Here it is on the table.

M. de L. Why, this purse is much prettier than his. It is not blue and it is charming. Let me take it; I warrant you I will make him change his mind about it.

Math. Here it is; but you must return it.

M. de L. How I detest that Madame de Blainville with her indigo! She has such ugly bulging eyes and a double chin. Mathilde, I tell you what we will do. It will not cost anything to try it. Your husband will return this evening?

Math. I think so.

M. de L. He will return, you may be sure of it. How is your courage this evening? When I have an idea, I have to grasp it or it escapes me. I am sure I shall succeed.

Math. Give your orders; I will obey.

M. de L. Go dress yourself as hastily as possible and get into my carriage. I do not intend to send you to the ball, but you must pretend that you have been there. You may drive where you wish, to Les Invalides or the Bastille. That will not be very exciting for you, but you might

as well be there as here. Do you agree? Now take your purse and wrap it up in this paper on which I am going to write the address. There, that is done. At the corner of the street you will stop; you will order my coachman to bring this little package here and deliver it to the first servant he encounters without any explanations.

Math. But tell me what you intend to do.

M. de L. No, that is impossible. Once for all, can you trust me?

Math. Yes, with all my heart.

M. de L. Well then, make haste, I hear a carriage in the street.

Math. It is he; I hear his voice in the court.

M. de L. Hurry then! Is there a secret stairway here?

Math. Yes, fortunately. But my hair is not dressed. How can I pretend to have been to the ball?

M. de L. (*taking some flowers from her hair and handing them to Mathilde*). Here, arrange these on the way.

(*Exit Mathilde.*)

M. de L. (*alone*). On her knees! Such a woman on her knees! And that man refused to listen to her request! A woman of twenty, beautiful as an angel, faithful as a greyhound! She begs that he will deign to accept a purse she has made, in exchange for a gift from Madame de Blainville! What an abyss is the heart of man!

Ah! we are better than they. (*She sits down and takes a magazine from the table. An instant later some one knocks at the door.*) Come in!

Scene VII

(*Madame de Léry. Chavigny.*)

M. de L. (*engrossed in her magazine*). Good evening, count. Will you have some tea?

Chav. Thank you, I never drink it.

(*He sits down and looks about him.*)

M. de L. Did you enjoy yourself at the ball?

Chav. Were you not there?

M. de L. Now that is a gallant question. No, I was not there, but I have sent Mathilde, for whom you seem to be looking.

Chav. You are joking.

M. de L. You think so? But pardon me, I am very much interested in this article in the *Revue.*

(*Silence. Chavigny becomes uneasy, and begins to walk the floor.*)

Chav. Is it true that Mathilde has gone to the ball?

M. de L. Why, yes; you see that I am waiting for her.

Chav. That is strange; she said she did not care to go, when you suggested it to her.

M. de L. She changed her mind apparently.

Chav. Why did she not go with you?

M. de L. Because I did not care to go.

Chav. She hired a passing carriage?

M. de L. No, she took mine. Have you read this magazine article?

Chav. What article?

M. de L. In the *Revue des Deux Mondes;* a very entertaining article by Madame Sand on the orang-outangs.

Chav. On the . . .?

M. de L. On the orang-outangs. Oh! no, I am mistaken; that is on the other page; it is very amusing.

Chav. I do not understand why she should go to the ball without saying a word to me about it. I would at least have come home with her.

M. de L. Do you like Madame Sand's stories?

Chav. No, not at all. But if she were there, why did I not see her?

M. de L. Who? George Sand?

Chav. You are pleased to be facetious.

M. de L. Perhaps; but to whom did you refer?

Chav. My wife, of course.

M. de L. Did you leave her in my charge? Am I her keeper?

Chav. You are right; I do you an injustice. I am going to look for her.

M. de L. Ah! you can never find her in that crowd.

Chav. Yes, that is so. I shall wait.

(*He sits down before the fire.*)

M. de L. (*dropping her magazine*). Do you know, M. de Chavigny, that you astonish me? I understood you to say that you allowed your wife perfect freedom, and that she could come and go as she pleased.

Chav. Certainly, you see the proof of it.

M. de L. Not at all; you are furious with anger.

Chav. I? Why, I am perfectly calm.

M. de L. You can not sit still a minute. You are another man, you are so much affected that I confess if I had foreseen this, I would not have loaned Mathilde my carriage.

Chav. But I assure you, I think it was the most natural thing in the world, and I thank you for it.

M. de L. No, no, you do not thank me for it. I am sure that you are as angry as you can be. To tell you the truth, I believe she decided to go just because she thought she might meet you there.

Chav. Indeed! Then why did she not accompany me?

M. de L. Yes, that is just what I said. We are accustomed to change our minds with the wind; we will not, and then we will. Do take some tea.

Chav. No, it is not good for me.

M. de L. Well then, give me some.

Chav. I beg your pardon, madame?

M. de L. You may give me some.

(*Chavigny rises and pours a cup of tea, which he offers to Madame de Léry.*)

M. de L. It is very good; put it there. Did you have a minister at the ball this evening?

Chav. I do not know.

M. de L. Those balls at the embassy are so funny; one enters the room without knowing why, and passes through as though part of a procession of marionettes.

Chav. Why do you not drink your tea? It is getting cold.

M. de L. You did not put any sugar in it. Two lumps please.

Chav. Certainly.

M. de L. Now a little milk.

Chav. Is that all?

M. de L. A drop of hot water. Hand me the cup.

Chav. (*offering her the cup*). Here it is, but it is not fit to drink.

M. de L. Are you so sure of it?

Chav. There is no doubt about it.

M. de L. And why is it not fit to drink?

Chav. Because it is cold and too sweet.

M. de L. Very well; if that is so, you may throw it away. (*Chavigny stands before her, holding the cup; Madame de Léry watches him*

and laughs at him.) Oh! how funny you are! I have never seen anything so comical.

(*Chavigny, becoming impatient, empties the cup in the fire, and walks up and down the room in anger.*)

Chav. What a fool I am!

M. de L. I have never seen jealousy so well represented; you are a veritable Othello.

Chav. Not at all. In what way am I jealous?

M. de L. Your self-love is wounded; you are just like all other husbands.

Chav. Bah! a woman's excuse; they say, "Your self-love is affected," as one would say, "Your humble servant." It is a convenient phrase. The world is very hard on the poor husbands.

M. de L. Not so hard on the men as on the women.

Chav. Indeed? Well, everything is relative. Could women possibly live on the same footing with us? It is absurd on the face of it. There are a thousand things that are serious matters for them and of no importance for men.

M. de L. Yes, caprices, for instance.

Chav. Why not? It is certain that men sometimes indulge in them, and women . . .

M. de L. As well. Do you think her dress is a talisman which should protect her from them?

M. de L. Well then, give me some.

Chav. I beg your pardon, madame?

M. de L. You may give me some.

(*Chavigny rises and pours a cup of tea, which he offers to Madame de Léry.*)

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Chav. Why not? It is certain that men sometimes indulge in them, and women . . .

M. de L. As well. Do you think her dress is a talisman which should protect her from them?

Chav. It is a barrier which ought to stop them.

M. de L. But it should not be a veil to cover them. But I hear some one in the hall. It is Mathilde returning.

Chav. Oh! no, it is not yet midnight. (*A servant enters and hands M. de Chavigny a little package.*) What is this?

Servant. It was just left for monsieur the count.

(*Exit servant. Chavigny unwraps the package, which contains Mathilde's purse.*)

M. de L. Another present? And at this hour? Well, this is becoming interesting.

Chav. What the devil does this mean? Here, François! who brought this package?

Servant (*returning*). Monsieur?

Chav. Who brought this package?

Servant. Monsieur, it was the porter.

Chav. Was there no letter with it?

Servant. No, monsieur.

Chav. How long was this package in the porter's possession?

Servant. He brought it up as soon as he received it.

Chav. Who gave it to him?

Servant. Monsieur, he does not know.

Chav. He does not know? Curse your stupidity! Was it a man or a woman?

Servant. It was a servant in livery, but he did not know him.

Chav. Is that servant below?

Servant. No, monsieur; he left immediately.

Chav. Did he leave no word?

Servant. No, monsieur.

Chav. That will do.

(*Exit servant.*)

M. de L. I fear you will be spoiled, M. de Chavigny. If you lose your money, it is not the fault of the ladies.

Chav. Hanged if I understand it.

M. de L. How innocent!

Chav. No, I give you my word of honor, I have no idea who has honored me. There must be some mistake about it.

M. de L. Is there an address on the package?

Chav. Why, that is so; I forgot that. Ah! the handwriting is very familiar.

M. de L. May I see it?

Chav. It may be indiscreet in me to show it to you, but so much the worse for the fair donor. I have certainly seen that handwriting somewhere.

M. de L. And I, too.

Chav. Let me see . . . No, I am mistaken.

M. de L. It is the English style. See how small the letters are! Oh! that lady is well educated.

Chav. You seem to recognize it.

M. de L. (*with feigned confusion*). I? Not at all. (*Chavigny looks at her with astonishment, then continues to pace up and down the room.*) Where were we in our conversation? Oh! yes, we were speaking of caprice. That little red trinket comes quite apropos.

Chav. You are in the secret. Come, confess.

M. de L. Some people are so stupid; if I were you, I would have guessed by this time.

Chav. Come, be frank; tell me who it is.

M. de L. I am quite certain it is Madame de Blainville.

Chav. You are merciless, madame; we shall quarrel if you are not careful.

M. de L. I think we shall; but not this time.

Chav. Will you help me solve this enigma?

M. de L. A fine occupation for me! Let us drop the subject; you may think it over before you go to sleep, but you are too polite to discuss it now.

Chav. Is there any more tea? I would like to have some.

M. de L. I shall make some for you; am I not kind?

(*Silence.*)

Chav. (*still pacing up and down*). The more I think about it, the less I know.

M. de L. Ah! there you go again! Did we not agree to drop the subject?

Chav. It must have fallen from the clouds.

M. de L. I tell you it is from Madame de Blainville. After reflecting on the color of her first purse, she decided to send you another by way of repentance. Or, better still, she wants to try you and see whether you will carry this one or the one you know came from her.

Chav. I shall carry this one, of course. That is the only way I can find out who sent it.

M. de L. I do not understand; you are too deep for me.

Chav. I suppose that the one who sent it to me may see it in my hand to-morrow; is that not possible?

M. de L. (*bursting out laughing*). Oh! that is too rich; I can not contain myself.

Chav. Perhaps you sent it yourself?

(*Silence.*)

M. de L. Here is your tea, made by my own white hand, and I will wager it is better than that decoction you offered me. But why do you keep looking at me? Do you take me for an anonymous letter?

Chav. It is some joke of yours. There is some dark plot in all this.

M. de L. Yes, both the plot and the purse are well knitted together.

Chav. Confess that you are one of the conspirators.

M. de L. No.

Chav. I beg of you, confess.

M. de L. Not a word.

Chav. Please do.

M. de L. Get down on your knees, and I will speak.

Chav. On my knees? Certainly, if you demand it.

M. de L. Come, let me see you.

Chav. Do you mean it?

(*He laughingly kneels before Madame de Léry.*)

M. de L. (*dryly*). I like that attitude, it is so becoming; but I advise you to rise before I become too much affected.

Chav. (*rising*). So you refuse to speak?

M. de L. Have you your blue purse?

Chav. I do not know; I think so.

M. de L. I think so, too. Give it to me, and I will tell you who made the other.

Chav. You know then?

M. de L. Yes, I know.

Chav. Is it a woman.

M. de L. It is not a man.

Chav. I mean, is she pretty?

M. de L. She is a woman whom you consider one of the most beautiful in Paris.

Chav. Blond or brunette?

M. de L. Blond.

Chav. What is the first letter of her name?

M. de L. You refuse to accept my bargain then? Give me Madame de Blainville's purse.

Chav. Is she large or small?

M. de L. Give me the purse.

Chav. Just tell me whether she has a small foot.

M. de L. Your purse or your life.

Chav. But will you tell me her name if I give you the purse?

M. de L. Yes.

Chav. (*drawing the blue purse from his pocket*). Your word of honor.

M. de L. My word of honor.

(*Chavigny pretends to hesitate; Madame de Léry holds out her hand and he looks at it intently. Suddenly he sits down beside her.*)

Chav. Let us talk about caprices. You confess then that women have them? Now, it may happen that a married man has two ways of thinking, and, within certain limits, two ways of acting.

M. de L. Yes, but that bargain? Have you forgotten it? I am prepared to keep my part of it.

Chav. A married man is none the less a man; the marriage ceremony does not metamorphose

him, but it sometimes compels him to play a rôle, to speak his lines, as it were. All one needs to know when he is addressed by any one, is whether the speaker addresses him as a person or a personage, whether his reply is to be sincere or conventional.

M. de L. I understand by that that it is a matter of choice; but how is the public to know how to choose correctly?

Chav. I do not think an intelligent public would find that difficult.

M. de L. You do not want to hear that name then? Come, hand me that purse.

Chav. An intelligent woman, for instance (an intelligent woman knows so much!), ought not to be deceived as to the true character of those she meets; she ought to see through conventionalities at a glance.

M. de L. So you have decided to keep your purse?

Chav. It seems to me you value it very highly. A woman of intelligence, madame, ought to know how to put herself in her husband's place. But where are your flowers?

M. de L. Oh! they were falling out all the time, so I took them off. Heavens! my hair is falling down now.

(*She rises and arranges her hair before the glass.*)

Chav. You have as pretty a form as one

could wish to see. An intelligent woman like you . . .

M. de L. An intelligent woman like me goes to the devil when she has to do with an intelligent man like you.

Chav. Well, so far as that is concerned, I am not such a bad sort of devil.

M. de L. You are not good enough for me.

Chav. Then it is because some rival wrongs me.

M. de L. What do you mean by that?

Chav. I mean that if I displease you, it is because some one prevents me from pleasing you.

M. de L. That is modest and polite; but you are mistaken; I care for no one, and no one cares for me.

Chav. At your age and with such eyes? I can not believe it.

M. de L. And yet it is true.

Chav. If I should believe it, I would have a poor opinion of men.

M. de L. I can easily convince you. My vanity will brook no master.

Chav. Will it not accept a vassal?

M. de L. Bah! kings or vassals, you are all tyrants.

Chav. That is true, and I confess that I have always despised such tyranny. I do not know why men impose on women terms which they are under no obligations to accept.

M. de L. Is that your sincere opinion?

Chav. It is; I do not understand why men should abuse privileges which are frankly conceded.

M. de L. Nevertheless, that is the fact.

Chav. Yes, I admit it; if men had more common sense, women would not be so prudent.

M. de L. Possibly; liaisons have come to be veritable marriages, and when it is a matter of setting the wedding day, one may well hesitate.

Chav. You are perfectly right; and tell me why is it thus? Why so much simulation and so little frankness? How can a pretty woman make proper distinctions? Men are fools.

M. de L. So it would seem.

Chav. But let us suppose, for instance, that there is a man who is incapable of such stupidity; let us suppose that an occasion presents itself when it is possible to be frank without danger, without reserve, without fear of the consequences. (*He takes her hand.*) Let us suppose he says to a woman: "We are alone; you are young and beautiful, and I appreciate your qualities of mind and heart at their true worth. A thousand obstacles stand in the way of our union; a thousand sorrows await us, if we meet again on the morrow. Your pride will accept no yoke, your prudence no bond; you shall have neither the one nor the other." He asks of you neither protestation nor pledge nor sacrifice,

nothing but a smile from those rosy lips, a glance from those beautiful eyes. He tells you that your liberty is on the sill of that door; you resume it immediately upon leaving the room; you are not offered pleasure without love, but love without sacrifice and bitterness; it is merely the caprice we were just talking about, not the blind caprice of the senses, but that of the heart, born of a glance, but as eternal as memory.

M. de L. You were speaking of comedy just now, but it appears that on occasion you can be serious enough. But I wish to indulge in a little caprice myself by way of replying to your elaborate argument. Have you a pack of cards here?

Chav. Yes, on that table; what do you want of them?

M. de L. Hand them to me; I have a little object lesson in reserve for you. (*She takes a card from the pack.*) Come, count, red or black?

Chav. But tell me, what is the stake?

M. de L. The stake is a discretion.*

Chav. Very well—I say red.

M. de L. It is the jack of spades; you have lost. Give me that blue purse.

Chav. With all my heart; but I keep the red, and although it is the color on which I lost, I

* A discretion is a wager which obliges the loser to give to the winner whatever may be demanded at his or her discretion.

shall never upbraid it, for I know as well as you what hand fashioned it.

M. de L. Is it large or small?

Chav. It is charming and soft as satin.

M. de L. Allow me to give vent to my jealousy then.

(*She throws the blue purse into the fire.*)

Chav. Ernestine, I adore you!

M. de L. (*watching the purse as it falls to ashes; she then approaches Chavigny and replies with tenderness*). Then you no longer love Madame de Blainville?

Chav. Ah, no! I have never loved her.

M. de L. Nor I, M. de Chavigny.

Chav. But who told you that I was thinking of that woman? Ah! she is not the woman to make me happy.

M. de L. Nor I either, M. de Chavigny. You have just made a little sacrifice for me; that was very gallant in you, but I do not wish to deceive you; the red purse is none of my work.

Chav. Is it possible. Then who did make it?

M. de L. A hand more beautiful than mine. Do me the favor to reflect a moment and explain this riddle for me. You have just made in good French a most amorous declaration; you have kneeled before me, and there is no carpet on the floor; I asked for the blue purse, and you allowed me to throw it into the fire. Who am I,

pray, to merit all that? What do you find in me that is so remarkable? I am not so bad, it is true; I am young, I have a small foot. But, in a word, such creatures as I are not rare. If we had proved to each other's satisfaction that I was a coquette and you a libertine, merely because it is midnight and we are alone, what a fine exploit we would have with which to decorate a page in our memoirs? And yet that is all there is to it, is it not? And what you smilingly grant me, that favor that costs you not one regret, that insignificant sacrifice you make to a caprice more insignificant still, you refuse the only woman who loves you, the only woman you love!

Chav. But, madame, how do you know all this?

M. de L. Not so loud, if you please; for I hear some one coming. I have not time to point my moral; you have a heart, let it speak. If you find that Mathilde's eyes are red, dry her tears on this little purse which those tears have already bedewed, for it is your good, brave and faithful wife who spent fifteen days making it. Adieu! You may be angry with me to-day, but to-morrow you will value my friendship and that will be better than yielding to a caprice. But here is Mathilde; together you will forget that there is any one else in the world. And Mathilde shall never know it.

(*Mathilde enters; Madame de Léry goes to meet her and kisses her; M. de Chavigny watches them, then approaches, takes Madame de Léry's flowers from his wife's hair and returns them to the former.*)

Chav. I beg your pardon, madame, she shall know it, and I will never forget that a young curé can preach the best of sermons.

(*The end of Caprice.*)

A DOOR MUST BE EITHER OPEN OR SHUT

A PROVERB IN ONE ACT

(Published in 1845; Acted in 1848.)

CHARACTERS

The Count — The Marquise

Scene—Paris.

(*The Marquise is seated on a sofa near the fire, embroidering. Enter the Count; he bows.*)

Count. I do not know when I shall get over my stupidity, but my memory is shocking. I can not possibly take upon me to remember your day; and whenever I want to see you, it is sure to be a Tuesday.

Mar. Have you anything to say to me?

Count. No; but suppose I had, I could not say it. It is only a chance that you are by yourself, and within the next quarter of an hour you are sure to have a number of intimate friends in here: they will put me to flight, I warn you.

Mar. It is true that to-day is my day, and I do not quite know why I have one. It is a fash-

ion; but there is a reason for it all the same. Our mothers left their doors open: good society was not numerous, and only meant for each circle a company of bores that one accepted as a matter of duty. Nowadays, when you are at home, you are at home to all Paris; and all Paris nowadays is in real earnest the whole of Paris, city and suburbs. When one is at home one's house is a street. A remedy had to be found, and, accordingly, everybody has their day. It is the only way to see as little as possible of each other, and when you say, "I am at home on Tuesdays," it is clearly just as if you said, "Leave me in peace on the other days——"

Count. That makes it all the worse for me to come to-day, since you allow me to see you in the week——

Mar. Make up your mind and sit down there. If you are in good temper, you may talk; if not, warm yourself. I do not expect a great many people to-day, and you shall watch the slides change in my little magic-lantern. But what is the matter with you? You seem——

Count. What?

Mar. I would not say the word for the world.

Count. Well, indeed, then I will admit it. Before I came in I was a little——

Mar. What? It is my turn now to ask.

Count. Will you be angry if I tell you?

Mar. There is a ball this evening, where I

want to look my best, so I shall not lose my temper all day.

Count. Well, I was a little bored. I do not know what is the matter with me: it is a fashionable affliction like your days. I have been wretched since twelve o'clock, paid four visits, and found no one in. I was to dine somewhere: excused myself without any reason. There is nothing to go to this evening. I went out in a bitter frost, saw nothing but red noses and blue cheeks. I do not know what to do. I am as stupid as a magazine article.

Mar. I can say the same for myself. I am bored to extinction. It is the weather, no doubt.

Count. The fact is, cold is so abominable. Winter is an ailment. Fools see the pavement clean and the sky clear, and when a good sharp wind nips their ears they call that a fine frost. It is like talking of a fine inflammation of the lungs. Many thanks for fineries of that sort.

Mar. I go further than you. It seems to me that I get my dullness not so much from the air out-of-doors, cold though it is, as from the air other people breathe. Perhaps it is that we are growing old. I am beginning to be thirty, and I am losing my talent for existence.

Count. It is a talent I never had, and what scares me is that I am picking it up. As one ages, one turns fogy or fool, and I am desperately afraid of dying a wiseacre.

Mar. Ring for them to put a log on the fire. Your idea freezes me.

(*A ring heard outside.*)

Count. It is not worth while. There is a ring at the door, and your procession is arriving.

Mar. Let us see who will carry the flag; and, above all, do your best to stay.

Count. No; decidedly I am off.

Mar. Where are you going?

Count. I have not an idea. (*He rises, bows, and opens the door.*) Adieu, Madame, till Thursday evening.

Mar. Why Thursday?

Count. Is it not your day at the opera? I will go and pay you a little visit.

Mar. I do not want you; you are too cross. Besides, I am taking M. Camus.

Count. M. Camus, your country neighbor?

Mar. Yes. He sold me apples and hay with great gallantry, and I want to return his civility.

Count. Now, that is just your way. The most wearisome creature! He should be fed on his own wares. And by the way, do you know what the world says?

Mar. No. But no one is coming. Who rang there?

Count (*looking out of window*). No one. A little girl, I think, with a bandbox—something or other—a washerwoman. She is there in the court, talking to your servants.

Mar. You call that something or other! That is polite of you. It is my bonnet. Well, what are they saying about me and M. Camus? Do shut that door. There is a terrible draft.

Count. People are saying that you are thinking of marrying again, and that M. Camus is a millionaire, and that he comes very often to your house.

Mar. Really! Is that all? And you tell me that to my face?

Count. I tell it you because people are talking of it.

Mar. That is a pretty reason. Do I repeat to you all the world says of you?

Count. Of me, Madame? What do they say, if you please, that will not bear repeating?

Mar. But you see, anything will bear repeating, since you tell me that I am on the eve of being announced as Madame Camus. The story about you is at least as serious, for, unfortunately, it appears that it is true.

Count. What can it be? You frighten me.

Mar. One more proof that the world is right.

Count. Explain yourself, I beg.

Mar. Oh, on no account. It is your own affair——

Count (*sitting down again*). I implore you, Marquise. I ask it as a favor. You are the person in all the world whose opinion I value most.

Mar. One of the persons, you mean.

Count. No, Madame, I say the person—she whose esteem, whose opinion——

Mar. Good heavens, you are going to turn a phrase.

Count. Not at all. If you see nothing, evidently it is because you will not see.

Mar. See what?

Count. You can not but understand——

Mar. I only understand what people tell me, and even then I am somewhat deaf.

Count. You laugh at everything; but, candidly, could it be possible, that after seeing you for a whole year, with your wit, your beauty, your grace——

Mar. But, good heavens! this is worse than a phrase; it is a declaration. Warn me at least. Is it a declaration or a New Year's compliment?

Count. And suppose it were a declaration?

Mar. Oh, I do not want it this morning. I told you I was going to a ball; I run the risk of hearing some this evening, and my health will not stand that sort of thing twice a day.

Count. Truly you are discouraging, and I shall be heartily delighted when your turn comes to be caught.

Mar. I shall be delighted myself. I swear to you, there are instants when I would give large sums to have even a little vexation. Why, that is how I felt while my hair was being dressed, only just a few minutes ago. I was sighing as

if my heart would break, from despair at having nothing to think of——

Count. Laugh away, laugh away; your turn will come.

Mar. Very possibly: we are all mortal. If I am reasonable, whose fault is that? I assure you, I do not try to prevent it.

Count. So you do not choose to be made love to?

Mar. No. I am very good-natured; but as for love-making, it is quite too stupid. Come now, you, who have common sense, tell me what does this mean: making love to a woman?

Count. It means that the woman in question pleases you, and that you like to tell her so.

Mar. Very well; but what about the woman? Does it please her to please you? For instance, you think me pretty, let us suppose, and it amuses you to let me know this. Well! what next? what does that prove? Is it a reason for me to love you? I imagine that if any one pleases me, that is not because I am pretty. What does he gain by these compliments? A pretty way, truly, to make a woman fall in love with you—to come and plant yourself in front of her with an eye-glass, look her over from head to foot, as if she were a doll in a shop window, and say to her very condescendingly: "Madame, I think you charming." Add to that a few stale phrases, a waltz and a bouquet, and that is what they call making

love to a woman. For shame! How can a man of brains take any pleasure in such silliness? It puts me into a passion when I think of it.

Count. Still there is nothing to get angry about.

Mar. On my word, there is. You must credit a woman with a very empty head and a great stock of stupidity to imagine that you can mix a charm for her out of such ingredients. Do you believe it is very diverting to pass one's life in the midst of a deluge of insipid things, and to have one's ears full of nonsense from morning to evening. Really, it seems to me that if I were a man, and saw a pretty woman, I should say to myself: "Here is a poor creature who is sure to be stifled with compliments." I should spare her; I should have pity on her; and if I wanted to find favor, I would do her the honor to talk to her of something else than her unhappy face. But no, it is always, "You are pretty," and then "You are pretty," and then "Pretty" again. Why, good heavens! we know it well enough. Shall I tell you the truth?—you men of fashion are nothing but confectioners in disguise.

Count. Well, Madame, you are charming, take it as you will.—There is another ring. Good-by; I am off.

Mar. Wait now; I wanted to tell you—I forget what it was. Ah! do you pass Frossin's by any chance in your wanderings?

Count. It will not be by chance, Madame, if I can be of any use to you.

Mar. Another compliment. Heavens, how you bore me! It is a ring I have broken. Of course I could simply send it, but I must explain to you. (*Taking the ring off her finger.*) There, do you see, it is the setting. There is a little point here, you see, do you not? That used to open at the side, here. I knocked it against something this morning, and the spring was broken.

Count. Why, Marquise,—without wanting to be indiscreet—there was hair in it!

Mar. Very possibly. At what are you laughing?

Count. I am not laughing the least bit in the world.

Mar. You are an impertinent creature; it is my husband's hair. But I hear no one. Who was it rang again there?

Count (*looking out of window*). Another little girl, and another bandbox. One more bonnet, I presume. By the way, after all this, you owe me a confidence.

Mar. Do shut that door; you are freezing me.

Count. I am just going. But you promise to tell what was said to you about me, do you not, Marquise?

Mar. Come to the ball this evening, and we will have a talk.

Count. Parbleu! Yes; talk in a ballroom! A nice spot for conversation, with trombone accompaniment and a clatter of glasses of *eau sucrée.* Some one walks on your toe, some one else shoves your elbow, while a powdered lackey stuffs an ice into your pocket. I put it to you, is that the place——?

Mar. Will you go or stay? I tell you again, you are giving me a cold. Since no one is coming, what drives you away?

Count (*shutting the door and sitting down again*). The fact is, do what I can, I feel in such bad humor that I am really afraid of wearing out your patience. Decidedly I must leave off coming to your house——

Mar. That is polite. And what has put that into your head?

Count. I do not know, but I bore you. You told me so yourself a moment ago, and I am quite conscious of it. What could be more natural? It is that unlucky lodging I have there opposite. I can not go out without looking at your windows, and I walk in here mechanically without reflecting what I come for.

Mar. If I told you, you were boring me this morning, that was because it is unusual. Seriously, you would pain me. I take great pleasure in seeing you——

Count. You? Not a bit. Do you know what I am going to do? I am going back to Italy.

Mar. Ah! And how will that suit mademoiselle?

Count. Mademoiselle who, please?

Mar. Mademoiselle—somebody. The young lady who is your *protégée*. What do I know of your ballet-girls' names?

Count. Ah! So that is the fine story they have been telling you about me?

Mar. Precisely. Do you deny it?

Count. It is a pack of rubbish.

Mar. It is unfortunate that you were very distinctly seen at the play in the company of a certain pink hat with flowers that only bloom at the opera. You haunt the side scenes, my neighbor; all the world knows that.

Count. Like your marriage with M. Camus.

Mar. You still harp on that.

Count. Well, why not?

Mar. M. Camus is a very worthy man. He is a millionaire several times over. His age, though it is venerable enough, is exactly right for a husband. I am a widow. He is a bachelor. He looks very well when he has his gloves on.

Count. And a night-cap. That is sure to suit him.

Mar. Will you be good enough to stop, please? Do people mention such things?

Count. Why yes, to any one who may see them.

Mar. Apparently it is those young ladies who teach you your pretty manners.

Count (*getting up and taking his hat*). Stop, Marquise, I must say good-by. You would make me say something improper.

Mar. What excessive delicacy!

Count. No, but really you are too cruel; it is bad enough to forbid me loving you, without accusing me of loving some one else.

Mar. Better and better. What a tragic tone! I forbade you to love me?

Count. Certainly; or to speak to you of it, at least.

Mar. Well, I permit you. Let me hear your eloquence.

Count. If you meant that——

Mar. What does it matter to you, provided I say it.

Count. It matters this much, that even in joke some one here might very probably run a risk.

Mar. Oh, oh! Grave perils, Monsieur?

Count. Perhaps, Madame. But unfortunately the danger would be only for me.

Mar. When one is afraid, one does not play at courage. Well, let me hear. You say nothing? You threaten me. I expose myself to your attack, and you do not stir. I was expecting at least to see you fling yourself at my feet like Roderigo or M. Camus himself. In your place, he would be there already.

Count. So it amuses you greatly to laugh at us poor folk?

Mar. And so it surprises you extremely that any one should dare to brave you to your face?

Count. Take care. If you are brave, I have been a hussar, let me tell you, Madame, and that not so very long ago.

Mar. Really! Very well then; by all means. A hussar proposal ought to be curious. I never saw one in all my life. Should you like me to call my lady's-maid? I presume she will be able to take her part. You shall give me a performance. (*Bell heard.*)

Count. That jingle again. Good-by, then, Marquise. At all events, I will not let you off so. (*He opens the door.*)

Mar. Till this evening, is it not? But what is that noise I hear?

Count (*looking out of the window*). It is a change in the weather. It is raining and hailing as hard as you please. There is a third bonnet coming for you, and I am greatly afraid there will be a cold inside it.

Mar. But is that noise thunder? In the middle of January? How about the almanacs?

Count. No, it is only a hurricane, a kind of waterspout passing——

Mar. It is frightful. But do shut the door. You can not go out in this weather. What can cause such a thing?

Count (*shutting the door*). Madame, it is the anger of heaven chastising panes of glass, umbrellas, ladies' ankles, and the chimney-pots.

Mar. And my horses out!

Count. They are in no danger, unless something falls on their heads.

Mar. Oh, laugh away. It is your turn. I am a very neat person, Monsieur. I do not like my horses splashed. It is beyond belief. A moment ago there was the loveliest sky you could see——

Count. You may safely reckon, I can tell you, that with this hail you will not have any one here. There is one of your days wasted——

Mar. Not at all, since you came. Do put down your hat. It bothers me.

Count. A compliment, Madame. Take care. You, who profess to hate them, might have yours taken for truth.

Mar. But I tell you so, and it is quite true. You give me great pleasure by coming to see me.

Count (*sitting down again near the Marquise*). Then let me love you.

Mar. But I tell you also, I am quite willing. It does not annoy me the least bit in the world.

Count. Then let me speak of it to you.

Mar. Hussar fashion, you mean?

Count. No, Madame. Be assured that even in default of heart I have enough good sense to respect you. But it seems to me that one has cer-

tainly a right without offending a person one respects——

Mar. To wait till the rain is over, you mean. You came in here a moment ago without knowing why. You told me so yourself. You were bored, you did not know what to do, you might have passed for being tolerably sulky. If you had found three people here, any three, no matter who, you would be there by the corner of the fire, at the present moment, talking literature or railways, after which you would go and dine. So it is because I was alone that you think yourself bound all of a sudden, yes, bound in honor to make love to me; this same eternal, intolerable love-making, that is so useless, so ridiculous, and so hackneyed an affair. Why, what have I done to you? Suppose a visitor comes in here, you will be witty, perhaps; but I am alone, and there you are more commonplace than an old couplet out of a comic opera, and in a moment you broach your subject; and if I chose to listen to you, you would administer a declaration to me—you would recite your love. Do you know what men look like under those circumstances? Like those poor hissed authors who have always a manuscript in their pockets, some unpublished and unplayable tragedy, and pull out this to batter your ears with it as soon as you are left alone with them for a quarter of an hour.

Count. So you tell me that I do not displease

you. I reply that I love you, and there is an end of it to your mind.

Mar. You love me no more than the Grand Turk.

Count. Oh, come now, that is too much. Listen to me for a single moment, and if you do not believe me sincere——

Mar. No, no, and no again! Good heavens! you think I do not know what you could tell me? I have the highest opinion of your studies; but do you think, because you are an educated man, that I have read nothing. Listen! I used to know a clever man who had bought somewhere or other a collection of fifty letters, not badly composed, very neatly written—love-letters, of course. These fifty letters were graduated, so as to compose a sort of little novel in which all situations were foreseen. There were some for declarations, some for moods of spleen or hope, for the moments of hypocrisy when one falls back on friendship, for quarrels, for despairs, for fits of jealousy, for sulkiness, even for rainy days like this. I have read these letters. The author professed, in a sort of preface, to have employed them on his own account, and never to have found a woman who resisted beyond the thirty-third number. Well! I resisted the whole collection. I ask you whether I am well read or no, and whether you flatter yourself you could have anything new to teach me.

Count. You have cloyed your palate, Marquise. You are jaded——

Mar. Insults? I prefer them; they are less insipid than your sugar-plums.

Count. Yes, the plain truth is you are jaded.

Mar. You think so? Well! not a bit of it!

Count. Jaded as an old Englishwoman with fourteen children.

Mar. As the feather that dances on my hat. So you imagine that it is a deep science to know you all by heart. Why, there is no study needed to learn that lesson; simply you have to be left to yourselves. Stop and think; it is a very simple calculation. Men chivalrous enough to respect our poor ears and never lapse into sugar-plums are extremely rare. Again, it can not be disputed that in the sorry moments when you try to lie in an attempt to phrase, you are all as like one another as a pack of cards. Happily for us, heaven's justice has placed at your disposal a very limited vocabulary. You have only one tune among you, as they say, so that the mere hearing of the same phrases, the mere repetition of the same words, and the same studied gestures, the same tender looks, the mere spectacle of all these different faces which may in themselves be more or less passable, but at these fatal moments all assume the same humbly victorious expression, is enough to work our salvation by laughter, or at least by sheer weariness. If I had a daughter, and if I

wished to guard her against what are called dangerous advances, I should take good care not to forbid her to listen to her partners' pastorals. I would simply tell her: "Do not listen to one only, listen to them all. Do not shut the book, do not mark the page: leave it open, let these gentlemen play their little farces to you. If by ill luck there is one that pleases you, do not resist the feeling. Only wait; there will come another, identically the same, who will disgust you with the pair of them. You are fifteen, let me say. Well, my child, that will go on so till thirty, and it will be always the same thing." There is the history and the science I know; do you call this being jaded?

Count. Horribly so, if what you say is true; and it seems to me so far from natural that the doubt might be allowed.

Mar. What matter to me whether you believe or no?

Count. Better still. Is it really possible? What, you, at your age, despise love? The words of a man who loves you affect you like a trashy novel. His looks, gestures, sentiments, seem like a comedy to you. You pride yourself on candor, and you see nothing but lies in the rest of the world. But from where do you come, Marquise? Who is it has given you these maxims of yours?

Mar. I have come a long way, neighbor mine.

Count. Yes, from your nurse. Women fancy

they know everything in the world. They know nothing at all. I put the question to yourself—what experience can you have? That of the traveler who had seen a red-haired woman at his inn, and set himself to note in his journal: "The women have red hair in this country."

Mar. I begged you to put a log on the fire.

Count (*putting on the log*). That a woman should be a prude is conceivable; that she should say No, should stop her ears, should hate love, is possible; but to deny its existence, that is a pretty joke. You discourage a poor devil by telling him, "I know what you are going to tell me." But has he not the right to reply, "Yes, Madame, you know perhaps; and I too know what men say when they love; but when I speak to you I forget it." There is nothing new under the sun. But I say in my turn, "What does that prove?"

Mar. Come, at least, this is better; you are talking capitally; it is the next thing to a book.

Count. Yes, I am talking; and I am assuring you that if you are such as it is your pleasure to seem, I pity you most sincerely.

Mar. Do not let me check you; make yourself at home.

Count. There is nothing in that to wound you. If you have the right to attack us, may we not reasonably defend ourselves? When you compare us to hissed authors, what is the stone you

think you are throwing? Why, heaven help us! if love is a comedy——

Mar. The fire is burning badly; that log is crooked.

Count (*arranging the fire*). If love is a comedy, that world-old comedy, hissed or not, is still, after all is said and done, the least poor performance that has been invented. The parts are hackneyed, I admit; but if the play were worthless the whole universe would not know it by heart; and I am wrong to call it old. Is that old which is immortal?

Mar. Monsieur, this is poetry.

Count. No, Madame; but these stale speeches, this poor discourse that bores you, these compliments, declarations, and all the doting nonsense are excellent old things, conventional if you like, wearisome if you like, sometimes ridiculous, but all of them accompaniments to another thing which is always young.

Mar. You are getting confused. What is it that is always old, and what is it that is always young?

Count. Love.

Mar. Monsieur, this is eloquence.

Count. No, Madame. I mean this: That love is eternally young, and that the ways of expressing it are, and will remain, eternally old. The worn-out formulas, the iterations, those tags of novels, that issue from your heart, you can not

say why, and all this pomp and circumstance, are just a procession of old chamberlains, old diplomats, old ministers, just the chatter of a king's antechamber; all these pass, but the king never dies. Love is dead, long live Love.

Mar. Love?

Count. Love. And even suppose one were merely fancying——

Mar. Give me the fire-screen there.

Count. This one?

Mar. No; the brocaded one. Your fire is putting out my eyes now.

Count (*handing the screen to the Marquise*). Even suppose it were merely fancy that one is in love, is not that a charming thing?

Mar. But I tell you it is always the same thing.

Count. And always new, as the song says. Why, what would you have us invent? Apparently you must be loved in Hebrew! That Venus there on your clock is also the same thing always; is she less beautiful for that, pray? If you are like your grandmother, are you the less pretty for that?

Mar. That's right, there is the chorus; pretty. Give me the cushion that is by you.

Count (*taking the cushion and holding it in his hand*). That Venus is made to be beautiful, to be loved and admired, that does not bore her in the least. If the splendid figure Milo con-

ceived ever had a living model, assuredly that woman had more lovers than she needed, and let herself be loved like any one else, like her cousin Astarte, like Aspasia, and Manon Lescaut.

Mar. Monsieur, this is mythology.

Count (*still holding the cushion*). No, Madame, I can not say how painful to me is the sight of this fashionable indifference, this mocking, disdainful coldness, this air of experience that reduces everything to nothing, in a young woman. You are not the first in whom I meet it; it is a disease that is going the round of the drawing-rooms. People turn aside, or yawn like you at this moment, and say that love is a thing not to be talked of. Then why do you wear lace? What is that tuft of feathers doing in your head?

Mar. And what is that cushion doing in your hand? I asked you for it to put under my feet.

Count. Well then, there it is, and there am I too, and whether you will or no, I will make you a declaration, as old as the streets, and as stupid as a goose, for I am madly in love with you.

(*He puts the cushion on the ground before the Marquise, and kneels down on it.*)

Mar. Will you do me the favor to remove yourself from there, if you please?

Count. No; you must listen to me first.

Mar. You won't get up?

Count. No, no, and no again, as you said a moment ago, unless you consent to hear me.

Mar. I have the honor to wish you a good morning. (*Rising.*)

Count (*still on his knees*). Marquise, in heaven's name, this is too cruel. You will madden me. You drive me to despair.

Mar. You will recover at the Café de Paris.

Count (*in the same position*). No, upon my honor. I speak from my heart. I will admit as much as you please that I came in here without any purpose. I only meant to pay you a passing visit; witness this door, that I opened three times to go. The conversation we have just had, your raillery, your very coldness, drew me on further perhaps than was right; but it is not to-day only, it is since the first day I saw you that I have loved you, that I have adored you. There is no exaggeration in the words I use. Yes, for more than a year I have adored you. I have dreamed——

Mar. Adieu!

(*Exit the Marquise, leaving the door open.*)

Count (*left alone, remains a moment longer on his knees, then rises and says:*) It is a positive fact that that door is icy. (*He is going out, and sees the Marquise.*)

Count. Ah, Marquise, you are laughing at me.

Mar. (*leaning against the half-open door*). So you have found your feet.

Count. Yes; and I am going, never to see you again.

Mar. Come to the ball this evening. I am keeping a valse for you.

Count. I will never, never see you again. I am in despair; I am lost.

Mar. What is the matter with you?

Count. I am lost. I love you like a child. I swear to you, on all that is most sacred in the world——

Mar. Adieu! (*She is going out.*)

Count. It is for me to leave, Madame. Stay, I beg of you. I feel how much I have to suffer——

Mar. (*in a serious tone*). Let us make an end now, monsieur. What do you want with me?

Count. Why, Madame, I wish, I should desire——

Mar. What? For, in short, you wear out my patience. Do you imagine that I am going to be your mistress, and succeed to your pink bonnets? I warn you that an idea of that kind does more than displease me. It is revolting.

Count. You, Marquise? Great heavens! if it were possible, it would be my whole life I would lay at your feet. It should be my name, my property, my honor itself, that I should wish to entrust to you. I, to confound you for a single instant, I do not merely say with those creatures of

whom you only speak to vex me, but with any woman in the world: could you really suppose it? Do you believe me so devoid of sense? Has my levity or my folly gone so far then as to make you doubt my respect? Can you, who were telling me a moment ago that you took some pleasure in seeing me, felt perhaps some friendship for me; is it not true, Marquise? Can you think that a man whom you have thus distinguished, whom you have found worthy of so precious and so sweet an indulgence, would not know your worth? Why, am I blind, or mad? You my mistress? No, but my wife.

Mar. Oh! very well. If you had told me that on arriving we should not have quarreled. So you want to marry me?

Count. Why, undoubtedly! I am dying to. I never dared to tell you, but for this last year I have been thinking of nothing else. I would give my life-blood to be allowed the faintest hope.

Mar. Wait now. You are richer than I.

Count. Oh, dear no, I do not think so. And what does that matter to you? I entreat of you, do not let us talk of these things. Your smile at this moment makes me shiver with hope and fear. One word, for pity's sake. My life is in your hands.

Mar. I am going to tell you two proverbs. The first is, Never play at cross purposes. Consequently, we will talk it over.

Count. Then what I have dared to tell you does not displease you?

Mar. Oh no! Here is my second proverb: A door must be either open or shut. Now for three-quarters of an hour here has this door, thanks to you, been neither one nor the other, and the room is perfectly icy. Consequence again—you are going to give me your arm to take me to dine at my mother's. After that you will go to Frossin's.

Count. Frossin's, Madame? For what reason?

Mar. My ring.

Count. Ah, that is true! I had forgotten all about it. Well then, your ring, Marquise.

Mar. Marquise, you say. Well then, on my ring there happens to be in the setting a little Marquise's coronet, and as that may be used for a seal, tell me, Count, what do you think? Perhaps the strawberry leaves will have to be taken off. There, I am going to put on my bonnet.

Count. You overwhelm me with joy. How am I to express——?

Mar. But do shut that unhappy door. This room will never be fit to live in again.

(*The End of A Door Must be Either Open or Shut.*)

LOUISON

CHARACTERS

The Duke.
Berthaud.
The Maréchale.
The Duchess.
Lisette.
Lackeys.
A Woman.

(*Costumes of the period of Louis XVI.*)

ACT THE FIRST

Scene I

Lisette (*alone*). Here I am in luck indeed. Enough is enough. Fate can be very provoking when it wishes. Just let honest folk put themselves in my place and tell me what I should do. For almost twenty years I had been living at home. God made me to laugh, and to live a simple country life. The village priest was my teacher. I learned what he knew, and perhaps a little bit more too, and I found it possible to have lovers without its costing me anything. My father was a farmer and I was his housekeeper. I busied myself about the house, always willing and cheerful. To oblige our folk I should willingly have taken the cows to pasture,

Aren't you tidy and smart looking

VOL. V, PAGE 69

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or the turkeys to the field. But one fine day I was sent off on my travels, put into a coach, with my bundle under my arm, ten crowns in my pocket, and the promise of good fortune and the best of husbands. I was sent off in the post-chaise, and reached Paris. Then I was at once dressed out in large hooped petticoats, gowned in taffeta, and blinded with powder. Then I am told that I am governess here; governess of what? Master has no children. There will be some later. A little room is furnished for me and I am told: "Henceforth you are to be called Lisette." I consent, and my rôle is to reign in peace over three housemaids and nine or ten lackeys. Until then my destiny gave me no great anxiety. The maréchale loves me; indeed she is my godmother. Her daughter-in-law, our duchess, has a very innocent air, but my lord the duke was away then. Where? I really don't know. Perhaps on pleasure bent, perhaps away at the wars. At last, just within the last few days, when it was scarcely expected, he wrote that he was coming back, and, my faith, no sooner was he home than he fell in love with me. I should like to know if any one ever heard of madder folly? His wife is as good and sweet as she is beautiful. She loves him, Heaven knows, and that rake can not be satisfied with that. He writes notes, talks all sorts of nonsense to me, gives me ribbons, bows, and silk mittens. Then

at last, grown more bold, only a minute ago, he tried to make me a present of this brilliant! A diamond for me! The matter is perfectly clear. Except for the money which it would bring me, what in the world could I do with it? I am not a duchess and I can not wear it. So, to put it plainly, he is trying to buy me. Let me see now, shall I be angry? It is not very convenient or pleasant to run counter to these fashionable tyrants, and the prison is there for a yes, or a no, when one glides about at Trianon in red-heeled slippers. Should I be frank and tell the whole story to my mistress? If I did, I should by a single word fill her heart with sorrow. I should forever disturb the peace of the house, perhaps, and for a simple caprice drive love away from it. Would it not be better to act with great discretion, and keep this insult locked up in my own heart? Yes, that would be more prudent. Ah, how anxious I am about it all. This brilliant is nice, . . . and so is my master. I am going to send him back the ring at this very moment, here in this paper. So much the worse for him, if he is in love with me.

Scene II

(*Lisette. The Duke.*)

The Duke (*aside*). No one here yet? They have gone to supper, I believe. There is Lisette . . . she is writing, good! to me, no doubt. Women really have an instinct which I admire, of writing out boldly and plainly what they do not dare to say. You are trying to escape me, my pretty one! Oh, I shall triumph! I laid the wager, and I am going to win. (*Aloud.*) Is supper ready? Good evening, my fair Lisette.

Lisette (*rising*). Your grace.

The Duke. What is wrong with you? On my honor you seem uneasy, disturbed. What is the trouble? You were dreaming? And what were you doing.

Lisette. Your grace, I was writing.

The Duke. And to whom, I should like to know? To some lover, little one?

Lisette. To yourself. Here.

(*She gives him the letter and starts to go out.*)

The Duke. And you are going away so quickly? No, parbleu! Stay here. What does this mean? What do I see? My ring which you are thus returning to me? (*He reads.*) "Your grace, you say that you love me . . . ." Yes,

certainly I say it, it is a fact. Do you think that I am deceiving you? Do you think me capable of it? (*He reads.*) "You say that you love me, but that is hard to believe, for the first step toward loving a person, it seems to me, is that of knowing a person, and servant though I may be . . ." Servant! what do you mean? Shame, you are not a servant. Servant! really this word shocks my sensibilities. (*He reads.*) "Servant though I may be, I am little understood by you, if you think that I am mercenary, if your grace thought that a love which would not give itself could be bought." What do you mean by *buying*? I buy you, my fair one? And with a simple ring, with a trifle? With a child's rattle which sparkles. Do you think that I am stupid enough to try to buy you? If such were my object, if I dared to attempt it, if Lisette's love were ever for sale, all my wealth would not be enough to buy such charms. Do we then offend her whom we love? And should she really think herself less esteemed if we wish to adorn her, without being able to embellish her, with a poor diamond which beside her eyes seems dull. What, place a ring upon the prettiest finger in the world. (*He slips the ring upon her finger.*) Place some jewels upon this white, round neck, over this heart upon which rises and falls sea-green silk of changing hue, bind this little foot in a net of silver, surround beauty in its

flower and its grace with the witchery of an art which it equals and surpasses! Is that then, my dear, so great a crime in your eyes? Pray efface this hateful word from your mind. Forget this note. Let us think of it no more, Lisette. We buy an intendant, a rustic, a grisette, but in this world below I do not think that any one has ever yet tried to buy a treasure, and your heart is without price, even were your face less fair.

Lisette. But your grace, nevertheless . . .

The Duke. Fie! you are playing the heartless. (*The door in the rear is opened.*) A word! . . . They are going to supper. The servants are already opening the door. Listen to me; we are going to the ball at the Opera, but I shall come back alone, and thanks to the confusion, I shall be able as soon as I enter to go out into the street again. You will be alone too. My lackeys see nothing. Accord me, I beg you, a moment's interview. A single moment for me, Lisette, and for yourself. It is not a lover, it is a friend who loves you, remember that.

Lisette. But really?

The Duke. I understand your fear, gladly would I see you elsewhere. And you could much better restore to me my lost liberty in some quiet spot, unknown to busy tongues. It is certainly neither to my taste nor is it my custom to surround pleasure with this air of treason. But you could not go out of this gloomy mansion, in

which you are always imprisoned, without being suspected. In my apartments, alone and in secret, we shall deceive all eyes; four steps from here we should be odious. Such is the law of the world. We must be the slaves of the world which is indulgent to him who laughs at it, severe with him who braves it; this world, which is kindly and harsh, recks not that we jest at it, if we only jest cleverly. Everything is excusable here below, save blundering. Good night, Louison.

Scene III

Lisette (*alone*). Good night! What a strange weakness. He deceives me, he jests at me, he lies like a Trojan. How comes it then that I say nothing? We shall be alone he said. What a noble soul he is to go to his neighbor's to leave there his wife, and then come gaily back on tiptoe as soon as he thinks he is forgotten in the crowd. Ah! when I was Louison, before I became Lisette, when I wore my peasant's cap, if I met one of these gentlemen with his fine words, I should have flung both my two wooden shoes in his face. But in spite of all that I did not know what to answer. What shall I do if he comes back? Let him cool his heels waiting? Shut myself up in my room behind two good bolts? I must think it out. His grace is not gentle, with all his playful ways and his cajolery.

I do not know how he would take the jest. Would it not be better to wait for him bravely, give him my reasons and listen to him for a moment? Is it not possible? Ah, Louison, unhappy woman. Is a great lord going to make you lose your heart? Is . . .? But who comes here?

Scene IV

(*Lisette. Berthaud.*)

Berthaud. It is I.

Lisette. Who are you?

Berthaud. Berthaud.

Lisette. Berthaud? What do you wish?

Berthaud. I? Nothing.

Lisette. You are nothing but a stupid? You should not come in this way without being called.

Berthaud. Oh! Mam'selle Louison, how fine you are! Aren't you tidy and smart-looking?

Lisette. What are you saying, my good fellow? I seem to know this lad.

Berthaud. What fine cork-screws you have in your ears; and what a dress, it looks just like a beehive.

Lisette. What did you say your name was?

Berthaud. Berthaud. And what a heavy chignon, and white slippers; you must have paid a good penny for them! You must be a little bit stuck-up, all the same.

Lisette. Well now, have you looked me over from head to foot to your satisfaction? But . . . why! it is you Lucas!

Berthaud. Do you recognize me?

Lisette. Of course! where do you come from?

Berthaud. My word, I don't know. To get here I came by so many streets that my mind is one muddle, and I have no legs left.

Lisette. Sit down.

Berthaud. Not at all. My manners are much too good; when I have my Sunday coat on I never sit down.

Lisette. Very well, it might wear out the embroidery. So you are no longer shepherd at our farm. Still you come from thereabouts. How is every one at home?

Berthaud. I don't know anything about it either. I did just as you did. I am no longer a cow-herder; rather, it now is Jean who takes them to the field and Suson who goes to milk them. Things are not at all as they were in your days. Big Nanon does the haying now, Pierrot is sacristan, and Thomas is off to the wars. Catherine is a nurse, and Nicole . . .

Lisette. And my father?

Berthaud. Your father, pardine! he lacks nothing. One can always feel sure that he eats and sleeps well.

Lisette. And you, how did you come to take flight?

Berthaud. Why, don't you see, when I saw that you were here, that you had made a success of things, I said to myself, "Paris isn't in the moon." I felt a sort of instinct to set out to make my fortune. Then I was lonely with my beasts, and then I loved you, to put it plainly in three words.

Lisette. You Lucas?

Berthaud. I, Lucas. Are you angry? The cat may look at the . . .

Lisette. No, no; I am touched by it. You call yourself Berthaud. How does that come about?

Berthaud. It is my family name. In Paris you have to have one. When you go out . . .

Lisette. You live comfortably, I hope?

Berthaud. Twenty-six livres a month, and almost nothing to do. If you have your wits about you, it is not hard to find work.

Lisette. Very true, and so you have got along very rapidly?

Berthaud. I should say so. I am a clerk.

Lisette. Ah! ah! to a notary?

Berthaud. No.

Lisette. To an attorney?

Berthaud. To an apothecary.

Lisette. Well, that is something to bring one's talents into play. Now, M. Berthaud, what do you wish here?

Berthaud. When I came I had some idea of it, but my imagination is just the least little

bit limited, and I was not expecting to see all these fixings of yours. I must say that your short skirts were much more fetching. You were much more buxom and much more feminine. Now there is nothing of you to be seen but a little of your chest. Nevertheless, in spite of your ribbons and your pretty little slippers, I still would marry you if you wished.

Lisette. You?

Berthaud. My father is a farmer in a smaller way than yours. Nevertheless in this world we live one bearing another.

Lisette. You think then that my hand would be worthy of you?

Berthaud. You would only have to speak the word if you wished it. Listen now; since we have spoken of the subject, and since you are not vexed, you are very pretty, which is well known and clearly to be seen, but I am not as ugly as I look. If big Margot were not so much at fault I should have had her without any trouble at all, and in the Rue aux Ours where I now live I am not said to be so unpleasing to the sight. I can sign my own name and I can read. I have just told you that I get twenty-six livres, but there are secrets too that I can tell you. My master is going to make me a present on New Year's day, and that is something. Now another idea: my Aunt Labalue is almost deceased, and in her chests she has, between you and me,

more than a hundred crowns' worth of gems and jewels, and one can not tell what all she has been hoarding up, nor the clothes she has, nor the dishes. It took her three quarters of an hour to make her will, and I am her sole heir. You are beginning to smile, my lass! I have something more to tell you. Thomas is a soldier. Gone off to look for glory. I, if I had been in his place, should have married Jeanneton; but all he needed was a musket-shot. He is my first cousin, may Heaven protect him! That life is not always the easiest and safest in the world. You see I am a rather good match. We should make a rather good-looking couple. Have you anything to say against the pharmacy? One is not obliged to taste in order to sell. Perhaps my talk seems to you a little bit funny and stupid? You have a very rich mind, and you aim high, but you see the whole thing in life is to be or to seem. You are rather showy, but you have your master to thank for that. When they send you off you will have nothing. I may have only one coat, I grant you, but it is my own. I have read in the works of M. de Voltaire that we all are equal on this earth. I have given a great deal of thought to this saying, and I have seen with my own eyes that it is true. We should despise no one in this life, for every one may take his chance in the lottery. This great man said it; it is his opinion and that is why I am ambitious.

Lisette. I am listening to you, Lucas. You are very eloquent. Will you change your opinion?

Berthaud. No, the deuce take me if I do.

Lisette. Well, stay here, do not go away. Notice his grace and follow every step he takes.

Berthaud. Yes.

Lisette. If you see him alone place yourself in his path.

Berthaud. Good!

Lisette. Tell him your plans for our marriage. Tell him it is I who earnestly beg him to look upon it with favor, and to give his consent?

Berthaud. But do you then consent?

Lisette. Certainly. The time is short. Go away now.

Berthaud. You consent?

Lisette. Some one is coming? It is the duchess. Hurry, . . . away from here!

Berthaud. You consent, Louison?

Lisette. Go, but be sure not to chatter about things around the house.

Scene V

(*La Maréchale. The Duke. The Duchess. Lisette in the background.*)

The Duke. So you are not coming to the opera, my dear?

The Duchess. No, not this evening, I think.

The Duke. Why not?

The Duchess. Why should I go, what is there to do?

The Duke. It is a fête to which every one who is connected with the king will go.

The Duchess. A fête for whom?

The Duke. For us.

The Duchess. Not for me.

Maréchale. My son, your quarrels are really very laughable. (*To Lisette, who starts to go out.*) Stay, Lisette, I have a word or two to say to you.

The Duke. Laugh if you will, madame, as you wish. You will not at all change my opinion. No, I can not understand at all the cause of this determination to retire from the world, this mania for living shut up in an old mansion house, to scorn pleasure as if it were a mortal sin, and to stay working over a tapestry, when all of Paris is going to a masked ball, and when I beg you to do it too.

The Duchess. I wish nothing which is opposed to your desires, but I am not well and I can not go out.

The Duke. Good! not well is your usual excuse.

The Maréchale. But if it is true, my son?

The Duke. There is nothing in it, mother. Indisposed!—that is woman's expression—but were you yesterday, or will you be so to-morrow?

No, you are this evening, and what is wrong with you I beg to know. An indisposition which comes as quickly as it goes, vapors, surely. A good excuse.

The Duchess. If you require it, I shall obey.

The Duke. Good heavens! no! Require! obey! God bless you! One would really think that you were being dragged to torture.

The Maréchale (*to the Duke*). Do not vex her. We shall have a game of piquet by the fireside to cheer her up a little bit.

The Duchess. Are you willing, monsieur?

The Duke. Certainly. (*Aside.*) This is maddening; all my plans knocked in the head. What a bother, what a nuisance! Lisette I know will be heart-broken. But I shall find her before I go out. I believe that Satan himself has taken lodging in the head of women. (*Aloud.*) Very well, I shall go alone then. Begin your game, ladies. Come, Jasmin, Lafleur, cards and lights. I wish you a thousand capots, piques, repiques, and quints. How so splendid a game must shorten the hours!

The Maréchale. A good game of piquet, my son, is not to be scorned. The king himself is very fond of it.

The Duke. The king . . . would be better occupied ruling.

The Duchess. The queen too sometimes takes a hand.

The Duke. Play then! but morbleau! it is scarcely worth while to bear a distinguished name, to be rich, witty, twenty years old, and beautiful as you are, if you waste your time in such a way. Really, patience becomes somewhat difficult. Why then, if you please, did I marry you? Why are you young and made to charm? What good is all that if no use is made of it? What does it avail you to have a hundred thousand crowns of income, and like Trissotin an amaranthine coach, and four great horses that are eating their heads off, if you are going to live yesterday, to-morrow and always as you live to-day. What is the good, tell me, of your lithe and beautiful figure, your air and your glance? . . . for you would be charming! I am your husband, but when that came about I had dreamed strange dreams about you. Yes! may it not displease you, and I shall make my confession. The late king used to display his mistress in the court, and often, do not doubt it, the flattering murmur of his courtiers rejoiced his heart. I a duke and your husband, could I not think that I had the right to derive some glory from displaying you? Since you have done me the honor of becoming mine, may I not have some pride in my happiness? You were beautiful and noble, and such I deem you. But what avails it to be noble, what avails it to be beautiful, if you can not walk with pride in this nobility and in this

beauty? If you do not know how to enter your bath-chair, and to lie back at ease in a golden hooped skirt and enter Trianon when the lackey, in his cocked hat, announces before you a proud name? My faith! I thought that you were of a different mettle. I thought that one might deign to be attractive without lowering oneself. I thought that you were less strait-laced, and I did not expect when you gave me your hand that you would count every step. I am going off to dress, adieu! (*To his mother.*) Good night, madame.

Scene VI

(*The Maréchale. The Duchess. Lisette.*)

The Maréchale. Lucile, you are suffering.

The Duchess. From the bottom of my soul.

The Maréchale. What is wrong, tell me?

The Duchess. I am sad unto death.

The Maréchale. You really are tormented a little.

The Duchess. I should obey. I should . . . forgive me, I really do not understand myself.

The Maréchale. Lisette, leave us.

Lisette (*going out*). Good heavens! How she loves him!

Scene VII

(*The Maréchale and the Duchess.*)

The Maréchale. Do you really take such light talk so seriously? Do you make a passing fit of vexation a real sorrow?

The Duchess. Madame, he is right . . . I am wrong, I am guilty. . . . I should obey . . . and I am incapable of it. All that he says is true; the fault is mine; I wound him, I vex him, and I know not why.

The Maréchale. You feel, you say, that you should obey, and yet you do not know whence comes your caprice.

The Duchess. No. When my heart speaks, it reasons poorly. Some terror, some feeling of fatality born in my sad heart, or my poor head, sometimes seizes upon me, when I am near him, and holds me. I would like to please him and go out with him, think of my adornment, and forget my sadness, and since he wishes it, try to be beautiful, yet all this causes me mortal fear. I feel my hand tremble when I take his arm; there is some one between us, whom I do not know.

The Maréchale. But, my prettiest, can you think such a thing? What do you really mean? Are you, at your age, going to speak like a for-

saken woman? Have you anything to reproach your husband with? What is it?

The Duchess. I scarcely know.

The Maréchale. Some one is between you? A woman assuredly. Is she known to you? Tell me.

The Duchess. I know nothing about it, but I am convinced of it.

The Maréchale. So, for four words you give yourself up to despair. And in reality you do not know what causes your sorrow. Would not one really think, seeing your sadness, that some fearful black secret troubles and oppresses you, and yet it is only a ball that you miss, that causes it all. I myself had these great sorrows when I was twenty years old. Do not pity yourself! I envy you your tears. When some day you really know what life is, you will regret these tears so easily and so quickly shed, but then you will shed them no more.

The Duchess. Yes, if it pleases you, you may smile at me, but they are none the less real, madame; and can we say, if suffering is there, that we are suffering without reason?

The Maréchale. Every avowal of a suffering helps in its cure. Allow yourself to speak truly, and let us hear this mystery.

The Duchess. I have no secret. What can I either say or conceal?

The Maréchale. If it were merely a child's

whim, would your heart wish to conceal it from me? Why do you hesitate, and why does your courage fail? Is it mistrust, is it my rank, my age, is it my friendship which you wish to shun, is it the marshal or I that you fear? Come, now, I beg you speak.

The Duchess. I know how good you are, but I can not speak.

The Maréchale. Then I command you. Your mother, Lucile, with her last breath commended you to me. You must obey.

The Duchess. I always shall obey and with all my heart, but once more I know nothing, madame, save my own suffering and my love for him.

The Maréchale. If it is true, my child, . . . (*To Lisette, who comes in.*) What bring you here?

Scene VIII

(*Lisette. The Maréchale. The Duchess.*)

Lisette (*to the Duchess*). Your dressmaker is here, madame, and told me . . .

The Duchess. Not this evening; she may come back again.

The Maréchale. Listen, my dear grief-stricken child. What has just come for you? A ball dress? Well, try it on. It is not a great affliction. A little while ago, if I remember,

you were asking for it. Sometimes we change our moods merely by changing our gowns. How pale you are growing! What is wrong my child?

The Duchess. Yes . . . that woman . . . the sight of her . . . at this moment. . . .

The Maréchale. But that woman, my dear, is Lisette. Let us go into your apartments. Come and dress up a little bit. First of all, little one, look attractive, and the rest is ours. Come now, cheer up! cheer up!

The Duchess. I give myself into your hands; my will bows before your kindness; you reminded me of the fact that I am an orphan. I will tell you my sorrows, my fears, my suffering, all, and you will understand certainly, madame, how a poor wounded heart, looking for some support, has need of a mother when she has lost her own.

ACT THE SECOND

Scene I

Berthaud (*alone*). What a long time these great lords take to dress! People are so slow about here that it makes me yawn. Louison told me to wait and to look out for her master, and to get in my little word with him as soon as he

appeared. For the last few minutes I have been hidden in the attic. It takes more time for one slipper than it would take me to have my wig arranged. He is being combed and curled; with his stockings down on his heels, his coat half on, a hair-dresser behind and a tailor before, he stands with a powder-puff in his hand, and dreams away as he looks at himself in the mirror. Chalk and rouge, musk and amber, and the room simply filled with clouds of powder . . . poof! if a duke has to do all that he might just as well be a woman or a ballet-girl from the opera. I should like to know what my father would say if I powdered up that way, when he used to give me such a thump on the back if I loitered behind our herds. With my quick ways, I am not the one, anyway, to spend an hour over buttoning up my coat. Being quick and lively was always my strong point, and yet it seems to me that I am well dressed. Let me see now; I had prepared my speech a little bit ago. I must not get my tongue twisted up. What am I going to say to the duke? I shall say "Your grace," yes, "Your grace," first of all. It is right and it is flattering. "Now, Mam'selle, Louison, . . ." No, I shall say Lisette; that is her Sunday name, and I must mind my manners. "Lisette then and I have decided. . . . No, we are inclined . . ." that is not it either. I shall begin over again. "Your

grace." It is too vexatious when I think that a few minutes ago in the attic I was simply filled with eloquence and to think that the right word can often accomplish everything. I have seen that happen on the stage. If I could only remember some happy pose or well-rounded sentence from a comedy. "Your grace, if the gods . . . if Heaven . . . if the lower regions . . ." I have it now: "If the heroes who purge the universe . . ." Are those the people whom I should invoke? No, that is rather equivocal for a pharmacist. "Your grace, if kings, if dukes had loved." Oh . . . I shall never get it. My cold is too bad. Some one rang down there. Louison is being called.

(*A bell rings.*)

Scene II

(*Berthaud. Lisette, carrying a gown over her arm.*)

Lisette. What are you doing here, Lucas?

Berthaud. Why, I am acting as sentinel. Did you not tell me to stay on the watch?

Lisette. Yes, but you are going to find some worthy lackey who will very discreetly show you the door.

Berthaud. What is that, that you have there?

Lisette. Some clothes that I am carrying.

Berthaud. More ornaments? Women's clothes? Have you whole shops of them here?

Lisette. Some one is coming in this direction. The duke, no doubt.

Berthaud. Good, I am going to speak to him.

Lisette. Yes, provided that you can get him to listen to you.

Berthaud. Oh, I thought up my speech in the attic.

Lisette. Remember that the best is sometimes the shortest.

Berthaud. Mine is excellent and I shall succeed in it. True, at the present moment I scarcely remember it. . . .

Lisette. I shall leave you, for they are waiting for me, but I shall come back.

Scene III

(*The Duke, Lisette and Berthaud.*)

The Duke (*dressed to go out*). Well, Lisette—well, you flee at the sight of me. Do I suit you, tell me?

(*He looks at himself in the mirror.*)

Lisette. As always.

The Duke. Who is this man?

Berthaud (*bowing repeatedly*). Your grace, . . . your grace . . . my name is Berthaud, sir, . . . I came . . .

The Duke. Out of my way.

Berthaud. Your grace. . . .

The Duke. Out of my way.

Berthaud. Your grace.

(*He withdraws bowing.*)

Scene IV

(*The Duke. Lisette.*)

The Duke. And you, come here.

Lisette. My mistress is waiting for me.

The Duke. Well, let her wait. She has her women, I suppose. She is pouting this evening. And do you think that for anything so slight I have given up hope of our meeting?

Lisette. It was only you, your grace, who had arranged it.

The Duke. I still arrange it.

Lisette. Allow me . . .

The Duke. No objections. Listen: the duchess is in there with my mother; no doubt they are discussing me at this very moment. Go to them. I shall go out through this apartment. I shall be preoccupied, gloomy, and in a fearfully bad temper, but you may be sure that as soon as the sound of my carriage is heard the duchess, after having duly deliberated, said some ill of

me, and perhaps wept a little, will change her mind. Her caprices are all the result of a little jealousy. Really she pretends to detest the opera. She would not go to it, but she will follow me there.

Lisette. I implore you to listen to me . . .

The Duke. I could safely wager my head on it. I have no doubt that it is with this intention that she is already making herself ready. You may be sure that she is going to call for her horses, choose the most bewitching of her dominoes, and with her eyes hidden under a pink hood go very far to seek the cause of the little trouble, which is very plain. May she find much to please her at this ball; but you know well that I shall not stay there. You know that I am coming back; so you see, my fair one, that any obstacle that you may raise is a mere trifle. I am going to make an odd visit or two, lose a few louis perhaps in their stupid games, spend my evening in talking and saying nothing, the day is given up to dulness and the rest to Zaire. (*A bell is heard.*) You are being called. Au revoir!

Scene V

Berthaud (*alone*). What a horror! I saw all. Clearly I am deceived. I am almost . . . Oh, virtue! Could one have supposed such wickedness possible? The duke speaks plainly.

Louison is his mistress. I did not dream it; I am sure of it, I was there. False woman. Marry one like her! Rack my brains to find better chosen words than in a grammar, and just to please her . . . All that to find that the object of my affections, even before I marry her, has lovers! And do you think that like a credulous husband I am going to swallow down your bad pill? Not at all, my pretty dear; I am not going to be caught that way. I am going to see the duchess, and I shall go forthwith. I shall go and tell her . . . Let me see, what shall I tell her? "Madame, if ever" . . . No, I must shorten it up. "Madame . . ." Good heavens! I feel my composure giving away. In the state in which I am, I feel that I shall go mad. Rather, I shall go and find the maréchale. There she is just now crossing the hall. I shall go and reveal everything. Come! stand firm! have a brave heart!

Scene VI

(*The Maréchale. Berthaud.*)

Berthaud. Madame.

The Maréchale. What is it?

Berthaud. Madame . . . I have the honor . . .

The Maréchale. What do you wish, my good fellow?

Berthaud. Madame, my name is . . .

The Maréchale. Well, what do you wish?

Berthaud. Berthaud.

The Maréchale. You must withdraw, my good man.

Berthaud. Madame, I came . . .

The Maréchale. Leave me.

Berthaud (*aside*). They seem to be hard of hearing around here. (*Aloud.*) Still if it were possible, madame.

The Maréchale. You must go away, I say.

Berthaud (*bowing*). I shall go out. (*Aside.*) Really this is remarkable. Oh, my time will come . . . I am going up to the attic to touch up my speech a little, and make time pass.

Scene VII

The Maréchale (*alone*). There can be no doubt about it, the duchess is jealous. My son has misunderstood his sweet, tender-hearted little wife. Lisette has done harm, and I must put a stop to it. Lucile is still in doubt and would like to hesitate. She is weak against herself and against her fears, and tears blur her vision. She could scarcely believe in such cruelty, that when she has so freely given her heart it should be rejected. She thinks that love so great as hers must be returned. But though she has closed her heart to every suspicion, her suffering is be-

coming too great and she vainly resists. I feel her speak to me through every pressure of the hand. Who can tell how far a moment's weakness might carry my son in his heedless youth? Sometimes chance goes so quickly and so far at a single step. I must be on the watch; and I must shoulder this responsibility.

Scene VIII

(*The Maréchale. Lisette.*)

The Maréchale. Lisette, where are you running so quickly?

Lisette. Madame, the duchess has had her hair dressed and I am going to get one of her dominoes.

The Maréchale. Is she going to mask herself? Why? Does she wish to go to the ball?

Lisette. I think so, madame.

The Maréchale. Strange! And my son?

Lisette. He went off ahead.

The Maréchale. Alone?

Lisette. Quite alone.

The Maréchale. Then my daughter-in-law is to meet him?

Lisette. I do not know; it is very difficult to get her toilet finished. Her dress will suit her one moment and not at all the next. She looks

at ten before she chooses one of them. She almost scolded her maids, and I think I was scolded too, and for the first time.

The Maréchale. Arrange to have some one take your place just now.

Lisette (*opening the door in the background*). Come, some one! Marton!

The Maréchale. Arrange to have them go through the drawing-room.

(*One of the women appears. Lisette whispers to her, the woman goes out at the rear.*)

The Maréchale. Well?

Lisette. Here I am, madame.

The Maréchale. Louison! You owe it to me that you are here. You father was a farmer on our estate. Your parents belong to me; I am your godmother. I have taken great care of you from your earliest years, and when you were a child I let you play with my children. Do you love me?

Lisette. Thank God, more than I can say.

The Maréchale. Does your heart speak frankly?

Lisette. As truly as it breathes.

The Maréchale. Supposing that through obedience or necessity you were obliged to hide the truth from me (the fear of danger takes away that of blame), supposing that you were obliged to lie, what then?

Lisette. I should be silent, madame.

The Maréchale. But if you were obliged.

Lisette. No one is obliged.

The Maréchale. Whence comes this diamond on your finger.

Lisette (*aside*). Ah, wretched woman that I am!

The Maréchale. So then you keep silent. Remember that since I have been forewarned your silence speaks, and can tell me enough.

Lisette. This diamond . . . belongs to me.

The Maréchale. Whence comes it?

Lisette. I do not know.

The Maréchale. Be careful, Louison!

Lisette. Madame, it is possible, I repeat, that one may be obliged to keep silence. If my lips are silent and must remain so, does it show that I fail in respect to you?

The Maréchale. Lisette may be silent when I command it, but Louison must speak if I ask it.

Lisette. I am called Lisette.

The Maréchale. Yes, in this house. Has your heart been changed as well as your name?

Lisette. I beg you, excuse me. I am so confused. My heart would gladly open itself but . . .

The Maréchale. If it refuses . . .

Lisette. No, madame, when you speak so I

can not bear to hesitate. This ring . . . belongs to him.

(*She falls on her knees.*)

The Maréchale. My son? I knew it. . . . Rise, my dear; in any case you have done better than in keeping silence. But what do you expect?

Lisette (*rising*). Nothing in the world.

The Maréchale. But why, now that your secret has escaped, have you shown this audacity and this imprudence?

Lisette. We speak as we can, we act as we think.

The Maréchale. Do you think then that the duke is your lover? And that it is possible to betray as one will, without fear of punishment? Do you think yourself important enough to be a mistress? . . . My question offends you and your pride suffers.

Lisette. Madame, I have just knelt to you, and all my pride is still at your feet. It can suffer without a murmur that you should humiliate me, but not that I should be outraged or slandered. I must not be accused of treason.

The Maréchale. Yes, that would attack Louison's honor.

Lisette. My honor, and why not, if you please? Every blade of grass in the sunlight has its own place. Why should I not have mine, if

you please? The world is large enough for all that God has made.

The Maréchale. You are speaking loudly, Lisette, and your attitude is changed.

Lisette. Madame, it is the attitude of my village, it was my father's, and I have always assumed it when I met with scorn. Of a truth, when honor is united with high rank 'tis a wonderfully fine chance if it finds riches, but if it is in the heart of people who count for nothing, it should be left to those whose only possession it is.

The Maréchale. But the idea of talking in such a way in this house! Do you remember that it is possible . . .

Lisette. That I should leave it? I know it only too well, and that it was this sad step which made me hesitate, I do not deny. To say farewell suddenly, first of all to you, madame, then to so many kindnesses, to so much real goodness, . . . to lose all for a single word, the present, the future, yes, that is why I almost lied. But I say again, even while I am being accused, that scorn I can not endure. When did you ever know me to deceive or betray? Point out to me my sin, before I am punished for it.

The Maréchale. You, yourself, but a moment ago confessed it.

Lisette. Is it my fault that the duke says that he loves me? If unfortunate gifts, regret-

fully accepted, insistent conversations, his whim . . .

The Maréchale. No more. I do not care for your confidences, much less to hear your impertinent talk. Your mistress is in there, not a word of what has passed! My son says that he loves you . . . away from here! Since you think your virtue slandered, you will have no difficulty in seeing it justified. You are so very resourceful, find some reason, invent some pretext, and leave the house.

Lisette. But I do not love him, madame.

The Maréchale. You, Lisette!

Lisette. No; I listen to what he has to say, but I am silent.

The Maréchale. I really should lose patience if I listened to any more such untruths.

Lisette. I should lose patience if I suffered any longer. So you drive me away? Is it really possible that a frank avowal finds you so insensible? (*The maréchale starts to go out.*) What, without a regret? Without according me a glance which is due to the saddest of farewells! And my father, madame, is it his daughter, Louison, the honest daughter of an honest family, Louison, who by your orders, and against her own wishes, came to Paris to obey and to serve, whom they will see return to-morrow to our humble home, dishonored, alone, and despairing? What have I done? Your son, rich, loved, and

all-powerful, bargains for me at a venture, and buys me casually; convinced that he can gain his wishes with a little money, and that a word will win love for him, he listens to himself and he pleases himself, and is answerable to himself alone. But I, when speech is tortured from me, instead of being heard, I am told that I lie. So be it. I shall remember that I was truthful. Justice of the happy and great ones of this earth! What matters a little harm done, provided the forgotten victim goes to weep in some distant, hidden spot, provided sated vanity does not hear our moan of suffering, as it tramples upon us.

The Maréchale. Do not give way to sorrow, without reason, and too quickly. We shall speak of this again to-morrow. Good night, Louison.

Scene IX

Lisette (*alone*). To-morrow! She is gone . . . There was no anger in her tone; perhaps she pities me even while she condemns me. But what is there left me? What can I do now? To-morrow, she says. . . . Never! it is impossible. The wrong is too real, the suspicion too horrible. Even if to-morrow, in her pity, she wished to keep me here, this is not the place for me. How can I leave it?

Scene X

(*Lisette. The Duchess, dressed in an open domino, her mask in her hand.*)

The Duchess. My mother is not here? What are you doing, Lisette?

Lisette. I knew, madame, that you were finishing your toilet. I was waiting until I should be needed to go in to you.

The Duchess. But really I do need you very much. A little while ago I was ill, uneasy, and perhaps my anxiety was evident to you, but you must not pay any attention to a chance word. You know me well enough not to be mistaken. Here is my hand, forget the whim of a moment.

Lisette (*kissing the hand of the duchess*). Ah, madame!

The Duchess. You must do me a service. The duke has gone to the ball at the Opera this evening. I should just like to see what he will do there. But in spite of myself I am so sad, so little in the humor for it, that I have no heart for this masquerade, and now that they are coming to tell me that the carriage is waiting, my courage fails me just when I should be starting off. Go there yourself, Louison, will you?

Lisette. I, madame?

The Duchess. Yes, I beg you. Take this

domino, which smothers me, and wearies me. (*She gives her her domino and her mask.*) Try to hear a little and to see a great deal. If you see the duke alone, you may accost him. Rouse his curiosity, if need be, but do not let him know you. If he is in the thrall of some goddess who has come down a moment from the heavens of the Opera, you understand, my dear? You are only to listen.

Lisette. Is it possible that you are so uneasy about this ball?

The Duchess. No, but go to it, nevertheless. Come back soon, Lisette.

Scene XI

Lisette (*alone*). Does fate take pleasure in making me its plaything? Should I remain? Leave? Go to the ball? Why? and why not? Perhaps I should have told all; but how break her heart when her hand draws you to her? No! no! The maréchale is the only one who accused me. And it is she alone whom I must disabuse, and not a word to any one else must escape my lips.

Scene XII

(*Lisette. Berthaud.*)

Berthaud (*coldly*). Good evening . . .

Lisette. Is it you again, Lucas? Well, what news? What have you done?

Berthaud. I have come to take leave of you. You see here a friend, but not a husband.

Lisette. Really? And why this tragic air?

Berthaud. Do not question me.

Lisette. When people go away they offer some explanation.

Berthaud. That is not hard—I know all.

Lisette. What do you know?

Berthaud. You dare to ask it? I have seen all.

Lisette. What have you seen?

Berthaud. Your sins, your horrors, frightful monster, crocodile, python!

Lisette. What! even this fool! So everything is in league against me to-day. Good faith, I have wept enough for a little laughter.

(*She bursts out laughing.*)

Berthaud. You laugh, you add cunning to artifice?

Lisette (*making him hold the domino*). Here, stupid, take this.

Berthaud. To disguise myself?

Lisette. No, to help me. Come, let us away.
Berthaud. Where?
Lisette. I will tell you.
Berthaud. What?
Lisette. You will find out.

Scene XIII

(*The Duchess. The Maréchale.*)

The Duchess. Yes, madame, I am staying, and Louison is taking my place. Sorrow pursues me, in spite of my effort. I struggle in vain. At each step my heart fails me. Poor Louison, you love her, do you not?

The Maréchale. Of course. Did I do wrong, in telling her my sorrow? Since I suffer so from it, I wish to be sure. I was very glad to—to make amends for the wrong I did, for I almost dismissed Louison. Yes, I know not why, in spite of myself, this very wrong wish has pursued me all day long. I was constantly being vexed at her, I even scolded her, and most unjustly. It is very cruel of us, is it not, to treat these people badly, to wound their feelings, when they spend their whole lives serving us, and simply because we have some passing care.

The Maréchale. Lisette, I suppose, said nothing when she went away?

The Duchess. No; had she something to say?

The Maréchale. To begin with, she might have asked your pardon.

The Duchess. My pardon, what have I to forgive, alas! I am rather the one to be pardoned, since I am given over to jealous suspicions. You would never believe to what wild lengths they lead one, if one gives way to them. A thousand horrible images fill my mind. In vain I tell myself that I am foolish, nothing can divert me from them, they are stronger than I am. My reason fails me, and changes to terror. I am surrounded, as it were, by a thick veil. I see myself misunderstood, I see myself deceived, distasteful to my husband, useless here below. I see myself ugly . . .

The Maréchale. Really, no one would believe you.

The Duchess. While he, madame, he is quite the contrary. Heaven made him to please and to charm. When the eye is dazzled by luxuriant elegance, people think that they are looking at his adornment, while in reality they see only him, only his subtle wit, his delicacy of feeling, his grace of manner, the charm of his unconscious nobility. Do I see it all wrongly, madame? And will you tell me that on this point I should not be believed?

The Maréchale. It is very difficult to answer you, my dear, if you are his wife . . .

The Duchess. Well?

The Maréchale. I am his mother.

The Duchess. Supposing we were the only two who thought him delightful! . . . But everybody loves him, and that is what tortures me. Do you think that I can, with a quiet heart, see him as he is at court and in town, in the midst of a band of gay and heedless young men, outstripping the boldest, at cards, on horseback, do you think that I can watch him with a quiet heart as he pursues, for his amusement, with faithless glances those happy beauties who understand the art of being beautiful? Then it is that I feel, to my mortal grief, how insignificant I must seem to him. How many are the qualities with which I have not been endowed and which another in my place might have possessed. And how true it is that, pursuing such a path, he must sooner or later relinquish my hand.

The Maréchale. As I have already said, this is a foolish anxiety.

The Duchess. Yes, I know that I do wrong in weeping, but that is exactly what distresses me. The other day, for example, at the king's ball Madame de Versel passed by me. You know her grand airs and how beautiful she is. A sea of admirers were murmuring about her, occasionally opening up for fear they should touch her, the moment that she happened to deign to walk.

The Maréchale. Yes, she is a splendid empty-headed creature.

The Duchess. A bow which she was wearing fell from her hair, and I leave you to imagine if when these gentlemen saw it they did not all spring forward to pick it up for her. The duke was the quickest of all, but instead of giving it back, he openly defied any one to come and take it from him. Whereupon the marquise instead of being astonished, took it from him with a smile, only to return it to him. I know perfectly well what you are going to say, but I felt myself grow pale at that smile. It was a jest, I admit. A little ball-room play, anything you like, but it hurts me.

The Maréchale. I do not blame you for being a little too sensitive. Take a little rest, my child, if possible. Forget for the moment your sorrows and the lady with the haughty air.

The Duchess. Spare my sorrows, madame, they are dear to me. Last year in the convent, when I learned from the abbess that I had a husband, that I was a duchess, my heart beat a little faster it is true, but only a little faster. The marriage took place, and at first I saw nothing but a young noble, full of gallantry, who gaily offered me his name, his rank and his life. It seemed to me so sweet to share all these possessions that I did not even think that such a life would change. If this is happiness, I said,

how strange that it can be so easily attained and yet considered so rare. But when, after a year of this happy slumber, there came gradually the moment of awakening, when the duke, wearied by a distasteful peace, suddenly filled with shame at having forgotten his position, wished to drag me along with him and hasten to overtake it, then I understood that I could not follow him so far. Then the world, that redoubtable specter, assumed before me its real aspect, and appeared before my eyes. . . . Its pleasures, its attractions, its dangers, the intoxicating atmosphere of the court and their momentary excitement, I had to see it all. Then distrust slowly taught me its cold experience. I saw the duke fêted, and welcomed by the king, joyful and happy everywhere, . . . except with me. For the first time my heart, which had become accustomed to a support, knew solitude. Then I became jealous, and one day I said to myself, "What I feel is no longer happiness, it is love."

The Maréchale. What do you mean?

The Duchess. Yes, love. When we are so young as to be ignorant of life, when we pronounce this word before we have learned to understand it, we see only a beautiful dream, a pleasant friendship, in which each one has his share of the common treasure. We think that to love is supreme happiness. No! Love means to see oneself disdained, or betrayed. To love is

to weep, to watch, to wait, above all, to love is to suffer.

(*She weeps.*)

The Maréchale. I have told you, Lucile, that I do not blame you; you wished to be loved, and nothing is easier. I beg you again take a little rest; and as I leave you, I wish to answer you in two words. You imagine that the duke is neglecting you. Your fault is fear, his is youth. My son is vain, light, frivolous; but once he loves, he will love forever. And you are the one, I answer for it, my dear, you are the one whom he will love. Remember these words of a mother. (*She kisses her.*) Marton is there; I shall send her to you.

The Duchess. Not yet!

The Maréchale. Farewell then.

Scene XIV

The Duchess (*alone*). Wait and watch. Such is my life now. Ah! I am worn out. (*She sits down on a sofa.*) Good heavens! what a dreary day. My strength is exhausted. Louison has not come back. What are they doing at that ball? What a strange pastime that banal pleasure is! To disguise one's face and one's voice, with what end in view? If what is said is wrong, better to be silent! If it is otherwise, why any

concealment? But, after all, they all go in search of the unknown. In spite of myself, sleep is overpowering me. My thoughts wander off, and then come back, then wearied, suddenly stop. Let me see now, I must try to read a little. (*She takes a book, opens it, and then puts it back on the table.*) This is worse still. A novel, good heavens! My eyes are closing; how uncomfortable it is to wait. (*She draws out her watch.*) Alas! poor little thing, with my finger tip I can make you go more quickly. I can break all your fragile little wheels—but Time! —you and I can change nothing in Time.

(*She falls asleep.*)

Scene XV

(*The Duchess, asleep. The Duke.*)

The Duke. No, never have I seen anything more absurd, than being addressed at a ball by one's servant! It is really more than strange. Was it really Louison? The girl must have lost her senses. I had arranged for an exceeding tender meeting there. It was agreed upon; all she had to do was to await me. I entered the ball-room without any particular object in view, and what did I see? My lady, who was passing and going in to supper without me. And that Berthaud with his hat on his head, swaggering

round with his conquest, getting drunk over cold chicken, and boldly announcing to me that he is going to marry her. On my soul, that was a splendid find of mine. If ever again in my life I take a fancy to a low-bred woman, I give you leave . . . What is the meaning of this? My wife alone here? She is asleep; I must go out. (*He starts to go out, and stops.*) How pretty she is! I wonder what on earth she was doing here? Is she really asleep? Who can tell? I shall experiment with her. "Ah, duchess!" She is asleep, and sound asleep. I am only her husband. . . . If I were a lover! In such an encounter one might, without falsehood, try, as they say, to pass for a dream. I have never seen her like this. But it is charming. What has she in her hand? Her watch. Yes, in truth. What can she do with such a thing while she is sleeping? It is as much as one can do to know the time when one is awake. Was she sitting up waiting this evening? By what chance? (*He looks at the watch of the duchess.*) One o'clock in the morning. That is said to be late. Sitting up waiting. Why? For me? What an idea! She was simply possessed with the thought of this ball. Her intention certainly was not to stay here to sleep. Perhaps to see me come back. Yes! Why should I try to deceive myself? If my wife is jealous it must mean that she loves me. I have never seen her guilty of

any pretense or evasion. She was waiting for me, that is as plain as day. My word! It was nice of me to go haphazard, looking for some silly face, under a silly mask, to meet at that wretched masquerade—what? Nothing that one cares anything for! Splendid occupation—to listen to three pieces of card-board babbling under their laces, to the sound of the music. To let Jadotte or Louison deceive me, when love and beauty are here in my house. Can I be foolish enough to flee what is pleasing, charming, and consoling; to seek happiness where not even its shadow falls; and to turn my back upon it, when it holds out its arms to me? Poor duchess, alas! so young—so beautiful—with her patience and her melancholy, I should worship her; but no, I go off rather to make myself the obscure rival of Berthaud. What a pity, good heavens! what poverty of soul! It is bad form to dare to love one's wife. Gossips are angry if you do not think as they do, and we appear ridiculous if we try to be happy.

(*Just then the duchess awakens, and listens, while feigning sleep.*)

Was I then born to follow their method of life? I can put on any rag, or a fashionable coat; I can set the fashion in embroideries, and yet, in my heart, all these fools make the law for me. How would it be if, nevertheless, in spite of what they may say, I should defy their laugh-

ter by showing them this heart? Yes, we can, when we hate, hide the truth—to deny that we love is cowardly. Suppose I dared to brave them, to say to them: "I am weary of your empty life; I have wandered with your throng until the present day, but shame drives me from it, and leads me back to love." What would they answer, all those painted and powdered rakes if they saw this fair and noble creature by my side, and if they saw me sheltering her under my ermine mantle, with my sword in my hand? I would say to them, "This proud duchess is my sister, my child, my wife, and my mistress. My life is in her heart and my place is at her feet."

(*He kneels. The maréchale appears in the background.*)

The Duchess. In my arms, dear Heart!

The Duke. What! you were listening?

The Duchess. Had I done better to sleep?

The Duke (*to the Maréchale*). And you too, my mother? Did I then speak so loudly?

The Maréchale. Had you done better to keep silence?

The Duke. No. I believed myself alone, and I thank Heaven that those whom I loved the best upon earth were given me for witnesses.

(*Laughter is heard in the wings.*)

The Duke. What is that?

The Duchess. It is Louison.

The Duke. God give her joy! You know that she is leaving?

The Duchess. No, indeed; who has dismissed her?

The Duke. She herself; she came to me this evening at the ball, and told me about it all, even about her husband. Ah, here they are!

Scene XVI

(*The Maréchale. The Duchess. The Duke. Louison and Berthaud.*)

The Maréchale. What is this that I hear, Lisette? That you wish to leave us without permission?

Lisette. I was just coming to ask your permission.

The Maréchale. You are marrying . . . this gentleman.

The Duke. It is a perfect passion.

Berthaud. Oh, yes!

Lisette. No, sir! He is only an honest fellow, the son of one of your farmers.

Berthaud (*to the Duchess*). Yes, madame, my name is . . .

Lisette. Be still!

Berthaud. Why should I, I am being spoken to.

Lisette. Keep still!

The Duchess (*to Lisette*). Really, he is not very handsome.

Lisette (*to the Duchess*). Handsome enough for me.

The Duke. My word, Berthaud, you do not feel the least compunction about coming to Paris and poaching upon our grounds and snatching away hearts from us all in a minute. You are a rogue.

Berthaud (*to Louison*). The gentleman is delightful.

The Duke. And do you feel better for your cold chicken, not to mention the bottle?

Berthaud. Wonderfully, sir. I . . .

Lisette. Do be still.

Berthaud. Again? Must I always keep still here? I shall make up for it at home.

Lisette (*to the Maréchale*). And you too, madame? Are you laughing at the thought of my future home?

The Maréchale (*drawing her aside*). No, Louison. I understand and I recognize your courage. If now I am sorry to see you leave, you at least shall have no occasion to regret it. You understand that I shall attend to your dowry, and I hope that I can make your return agreeable to your father. As for your future husband . . .

Lisette. You told me a little while ago that I must find some pretext.

The Duke. Come, Berthaud. You must love your wife—she is good and she is beautiful. That, after all, is the wisest folly in this world below.

(*End of Louison.*)

"Very strange with your memory"

VOL. V. PAGE 121

ONE CAN NOT THINK OF EVERYTHING

COMEDY IN ONE ACT

CHARACTERS

THE MARQUIS DE VALBERG.
THE BARON.
GERMAIN.
THE COUNTESS DE VERNON.
VICTOIRE, *maid to the Countess.*

Scene—The Country.

SCENE I

(*The Baron. Germain.*)

Baron. You say my nephew is not here?

Germain. No, monsieur, I have searched everywhere.

Baron. It is just five o'clock. Is it possible that we are not at the home of the countess?

Ger. Yes, monsieur, this is her piano.

Baron. Is my nephew in love with her?

Ger. Yes, monsieur, it is true.

Baron. Does he visit with her every day?

Ger. Monsieur, he does nothing else.

Baron. Did he not receive my letter?

Ger. This very morning.

Baron. Then he must be in this château, as

he is not at home. I have notified him that I intended to leave Paris at a quarter past one, and would therefore arrive at Montgeron at three o'clock. From Montgeron to this point is exactly two and one half leagues. Two and one half leagues in two hours, supposing the roads were bad, which, all things considered, they are not.

Ger. On the contrary, they are very good.

Baron. Setting out from Montgeron at three, I ought to reach the tavern at quarter past four. I called on M. Duplessis, which took me perhaps fifteen minutes. Then allowing sufficient time to make the distance, I should reach this place by five o'clock. Then it must be just five now. Is my calculation correct?

Ger. Quite correct, monsieur; but my master is not here.

Baron. Has his baggage arrived.

Ger. What baggage, if you please?

Baron. His trunks; are they not ready packed down there at his château?

Ger. I do not know.

Baron. Why, I notified him that the grand duchess was in confinement, the Grand Duchess of Saxe-Gotha, Germain; that is no small affair.

Ger. No, it is not.

Baron. I wrote him that M. Desprez visited me day before yesterday, M. Desprez from Saint-Cloud. He came to notify me that the

ministry desired my presence at its meeting on the following day, that was yesterday. I was about to obey that order when I was advised that the ministers had accompanied the king to Compiégne. So I started for Compiégne, as I knew there was no time to be lost. The minister was out hunting. I was directed to go to M. de Gercourt, who secretly conducted me to his private apartments; the king had set out for Fontainebleau.

Ger. That was unfortunate.

Baron. Not at all. I merely recount that experience as a proof that I am always punctual.

Ger. Oh! yes, you are right.

Baron. Punctuality is one of the rarest qualities, and yet, one might say that it lies at the base of, that it is the key to all others. For just as the most beautiful music, the finest eloquence, might fail to please under certain unfavorable conditions, so rarest virtues and most gracious deeds are significant only as they are the product of the occasion which requires them. Remember, Germain, that nothing is more pitiful than an untimely arrival, no matter how great the merit which would seem to excuse it; for instance, that celebrated diplomat, who arrived too late at the death-bed of his prince, and found the queen rolling her hair on curl papers. Thus the effect of the most brilliant talents is lost, and the glory of war as well as the renown of

statecraft has often been sacrificed to the caprice of a time-piece. Is your watch well-regulated, my friend?

Ger. I set it every hour, monsieur.

Baron. Good. Well, you should know that, having met the Marquis de Morivaux, who gave me a place in his carriage, I learned that the minister had returned to Paris. His Excellency received me at half past two, and informed me that the Grand Duchess of Gotha was in confinement, and that the king had chosen my nephew and me to go and present his congratulations.

Ger. At Gotha, monsieur?

Baron. At Gotha. It is a great honor for your master.

Ger. Yes, monsieur, but he is not here.

Baron. That is what I do not understand. Is he always so thoughtless?

Ger. No, monsieur, not always. He does not forget, he thinks of something else.

Baron. We must start for Germany without fail to-morrow morning. He has given no orders to prepare for his departure?

Ger. No, monsieur. This morning, before going out, he opened a large trunk.

Baron. And what did he put in it?

Ger. A sheet of music.

Baron. A sheet of music!

Ger. Yes, monsieur; then he closed the trunk

very carefully, locked it, and put the key in his pocket.

Baron. A sheet of music! Another piece of folly! If the king knew of these whims he would not dare confide to him a mission of such importance as this. Happily he will be under my care. Well, what did he say, what did he do?

Ger. He sung, monsieur, he sung all day long.

Baron. He sung?

Ger. Beautifully, monsieur; it was a pleasure to listen to him.

Baron. A fine prelude for an ambassador! You have some sense, Germain. Tell me frankly, do you think him capable of conducting himself properly in such a delicate matter?

Ger. What, monsieur! As going to Gotha to make his little bow to a woman in confinement? Why, I could do that myself.

Baron. You do not know what you are speaking about.

Ger. About the grand duchess, monsieur; you just told me she was in confinement.

Baron. It is true, she has announced the day when a new bud will appear on an illustrious branch. But what can my nephew be doing?

Ger. He comes here very frequently to see madame the countess.

Baron. And where is the countess?

Ger. Monsieur, she has not yet risen.

Baron. At this hour? She does not dine, then?

Ger. No, monsieur, she sups.

Baron. Another rattle-brain. Nice neighborhood for a fool.

Ger. My master would be angry, monsieur, if he should hear any one talk about him in that way. When any one dares criticize his course or make the slightest censure on his character, his wrath is something terrible. Why, the other day he almost beat me to death because he put tobacco on his berries instead of sugar, and just yesterday——

Baron. Heavens! Is it possible that a man of his ability (and my nephew is a distinguished man) can be guilty of such deplorable, such puerile acts as those?

Ger. It is very sad, monsieur.

Baron. Have I not with my own eyes seen him go through a royal quadrille with his hands in his pockets, and walk through the throng of dancers as though he were in his own garden?

Ger. Parbleu! monsieur, he did that very thing the other evening at the countess's. There was a large company, and M. Vertigo, the poet, was reading a melodrama in verse. At the most pathetic part, monsieur, when the young lady

who had been poisoned had just recognized her father as her murderer, when all the ladies were melting into tears, what did my master do but leave his seat and take a drink of water from the glass the author had placed on a table before him. The entire scene was spoiled.

Baron. I am not at all surprised. I remember when he put thirty sous in a cup of tea which he offered a certain charming lady, thinking she would take them for the poor.

Ger. Last winter you were absent at the time of his brother's marriage. He was to perform honors at the wedding supper. Toward evening I went to his room to aid him dress for the occasion. He sent me away, took off all his clothes and began to pace up and down the room in his gown; suddenly he stopped short, looked at himself in the glass with astonishment. "What the devil am I doing?" he murmured. "It is night, and I should go to bed." With that he got into bed, forgetting all about the wedding feast.

Baron. And do you think such an erratic fellow is fit to go to Gotha? See what a task I have undertaken, Germain, for the will of the king must be fulfilled. I need not say that my nephew has the title, that I merely accompany him. His father's name was greater than mine; so he has the honor and I the responsibility.

Ger. But my master has merits.

Baron. Certainly, but is that enough? He has promised me to correct his faults.

Ger. He tries to do so, monsieur; but he can not help going by contraries. But here he comes.

Scene II

(*The Baron. Germain. The Marquis.*)

Marquis. Ah! then it is a wager? Will some one always contrive to steal my papers?

Ger. Monsieur, here is the baron.

Mar. You rogue, what have you done with that sheet of music I value so highly? Where is it? Where have you put it?

Baron. Good day, Valberg; how are you to-day?

Mar. I will clear my house one of these days; I will put you out-of-doors. (*To the baron, who is laughing.*) And you, you grinning knave, will be the first to go.

Ger. Monsieur, that is the baron.

Mar. Ah! pardon me, my dear uncle, you come from Paris? You see, I have lost a roll of music.

Baron. You see, my nephew, that I am punctual; I have arrived at the hour I set. Are you prepared to start?

Mar. To start?

Baron. Yes, to-morrow morning.

Mar. Yes, I swear that if I am refused, I shall go away at once, and you will never see me again.

Baron. What refusal do you speak of? What do you mean?

Mar. Upon my honor, if I am coldly received, if my proposal is treated with disdain, my decision is taken.

Baron. Eh! coldly received by whom? What have you to fear, coming, as you do, from the king?

Mar. Does the king meddle with this?

Baron. Apparently, since you are to convey an autograph letter from His Majesty.

Mar. For the countess?

Baron. For the grand duchess. Have you forgotten that you have been commissioned?

Mar. Oh! yes; I was thinking of a letter I am about to write to the countess. Have you seen her?

Baron. No, she is asleep.

Mar. Very well. What do you think of that affair? Am I not right?

Baron. What affair?

Mar. Oh! I know what you will say. You will never admit that I am right; you have quarreled with me and brought suit to recover a miserable quarter of a vineyard; the matter is now before parliament. I will wager that the law will be rejected.

Baron. What are you talking about? Serious matters should receive all your attention.

Mar. If that is the case, you have only to speak; I am all attention.

Baron. You have read that letter I sent you about the embassy to Gotha?

Mar. The embassy? Certainly, I am always at the king's service.

Baron. Very good.

Mar. His Majesty knows my devotion.

Baron. Certainly. You will be ready then?

Mar. Can you doubt it? I have given my orders; Germain, is everything ready?

Ger. Monsieur, I have received no orders.

Mar. What's that, you knave? Did I not tell you to place that large trunk in the middle of the room?

Ger. Yes, if perchance monsieur merely wishes to sing on the way . . .

Mar. To sing on the way, impertinent!

Ger. Yes, monsieur, for there is nothing in the trunk but your roll of music, and you have the key in your pocket.

Mar. In my . . . Why, so it is. It must have been given me with my gloves or my handkerchief. These servants here serve me villainously.

Ger. I assure you, monsieur . . .

Baron. Not a word! Leave us and go prepare everything for our journey. (*Exit Ger-*

main.) Now, Valberg, I must leave you to return to M. Duplessis to get letters from the court. I have just two words to say to you; first, our journey to Gotha is no ordinary mission; and second, the manner in which you conduct yourself in this important matter will largely determine your future.

Mar. Alas! I am but too well aware of it.

Baron. Therefore I want you to promise me to make an effort to overcome that tendency to distraction, that absent-mindedness that results in so many embarrassing situations.

Mar. Oh! as for that, I cheerfully give you my word.

Baron. Seriously?

Mar. Seriously.

Baron. Then go and see that your orders are executed. It is twenty minutes to six. I am going to M. Duplessis; it is not far; I shall return for dinner. Come, do you promise to follow my advice in all things? You know how important a matter is form in these court ceremonies.

Mar. Oh! do not trouble yourself about that. I know just how to go through these things. I write everything down. But I must know the name of the judge-advocate, and I will see him myself.

Baron. I have nothing to do with a judge-advocate; what do you mean?

Mar. If you have no judge-advocate, you can not go on with your case.

Baron. But I have no case.

Mar. What! Did you not just now say something about court?

Baron. I was speaking of the court of Saxony.

Mar. Ah! then you had reference to our embassy . . . I am somewhat preoccupied; the countess has a suit at court, and I am looking after it. She is a charming woman!

Baron. Yes, yes, every one knows you are infatuated with her, but do not let that interfere with our plans, if you please.

Mar. Have no fears on that subject. When I am not thinking, I may appear a little heedless; but when I take hold of serious matters, no one is more attentive than I.

Baron. Good!

Mar. You may go to M. Duplessis, and be assured that I will attend to everything in your absence.

Baron. We shall see.

Mar. I shall watch Germain for fear he will make some error.

Baron. That is right.

Mar. And then I shall finish fixing my papers in order. I have much to do.

Baron. Do not delay then, I beg of you.

Mar. Not a moment. Go, monsieur, I shall

write to my mother while you are gone; . . . it is only right that I should thank the minister; I shall leave my dogs with Madame de Belleroche; I shall notify all my relatives, and by the time you return I hope the marriage will be decided upon.

Baron (*stopping short as he is about to leave the room*). The marriage! What marriage?

Mar. Why, mine, of course. Did I not tell you about it?

Bar. What is all this about? Your marriage, did you say?

Mar. Yes, with the countess; did I not tell you that I intend to marry her?

Baron. No, you did not.

Mar. So I have many things to attend to, as you see.

Baron. But one does not marry on the eve of an important journey; you mean that you intend to marry on your return.

Mar. No, my fate is to be decided to-day.

Baron. Do not think of it, my friend.

Mar. I am thinking of it very seriously, for I shall not leave this spot until I have the countess's final answer.

Baron. But whether that answer is favorable or unfavorable, what has that to do with our embassy? You do not propose to take the countess with you, do you?

Mar. Why not, if she consents?

Baron. Heavens! a woman traveling! Hats, dresses, maids, a shower of boxes, nights at an inn, screams over a broken carriage . . .

Mar. Mere bagatelles.

Baron. Comfort is not a bagatelle. In my letters of instruction there is nothing said about a woman, and I do not know how the king would take it.

Mar. I care very little for that.

Baron. But I care a great deal, and if you insist, I tell you . . . (*The marquis sits down at the piano and begins to play. Aside.*) Truly, that fellow is a fool; it is impossible for him to go to Gotha. What shall I do? I can not go alone, his name is clearly mentioned in the royal letter. If I should attempt to explain why he did not go, there would be a scandal, and if I should have my name put in the place of his (which I would be justified in doing), the delay would cause the whole thing to fail. (*Some one rings.*) Heavens! it is the countess . . . I shall be too late for M. Duplessis. My nephew, kindly listen to me.

Mar. Why, I thought you had gone.

Baron. You are in love with the countess.

Mar. That is my secret.

Baron. You have told me so.

Mar. If I have allowed you to surmise it, I will not deny it.

Baron. No joking, I pray you. I can not

help you any with the countess; she detests me, and I am pressed for time. Here is what I propose. Two things have an important bearing upon your future: your marriage and your embassy. Do not sacrifice one to the other.

Mar. Certainly not.

Baron. See the countess, obtain her reply. If she accepts, I do not object to her going to Germany, but, of course, she could not go with us.

Mar. Of course not.

Baron. But she could meet you there.

Mar. That is an excellent idea.

Baron. And if she refuses . . .

Mar. If she refuses, I leave her forever.

Baron. That is right, for she would prove herself an ingrate.

Mar. But I should continue to adore her!

Baron. Certainly. (*Aside.*) He is not such a bad fellow, and even his eccentricities may be turned to his profit. But he must be managed. Yes, he will do to go to Gotha. (*Aloud.*) Well, it is agreed; I leave you. Upon my return your success will, I trust, be assured, for the countess is evidently expecting a declaration from you.

Mar. I am not so sure of that, for several times I have been about to speak to her, when something or other has interrupted and made me forget all about it; but this time I have placed a piece of paper in my pocket to remind me of it.

Baron. You are making fine progress!

Mar. I do not know that she will consent, for it is difficult to fix her attention for any length of time on one subject. When you speak to her she seems to listen, when the fact is she is a hundred miles away.

Baron. Perhaps she is absent-minded.

Mar. Yes, that is it, absent-minded. It is unendurable.

Baron. You are right.—But I must be off to see M. Duplessis.

Mar. Yes, you will do well, for that wedding, the lawsuit and the embassy give me much to do. I have a thousand letters to answer. She wants me to read a new story with her . . . All those things can not be done at once, you know.

Baron. Yes, yes, think of your marriage. (*Aside, as he turns to leave the room.*) He says he is going to watch Germain, but I shall get Germain to watch him.

Scene III

(*The Marquis. Victoire.*)

Mar. Hello! Where are the servants?

Victoire. What does monsieur wish?

Mar. Give me my dressing-gown.

Vic. You surely do not mean it, monsieur.

Mar. Why, yes, certainly.

Vic. The countess has been told that you are here, and she will soon see you.

Mar. Why should she do that? I will order my horses and go to her.

Vic. But, monsieur, you are already in her house.

Mar. You are right . . . That is what I thought . . .

Vic. Monsieur, here is the countess.

Scene IV

(*The Countess. The Marquis. Victoire.*)

Countess. François, tell Victoire to come here.

Vic. Here I am, madame.

Countess. Good . . . Monsieur de Valberg, I am delighted to see you . . . Yesterday you were in such an interesting state of distraction . . . I like you that way.

Mar. That is not the way to correct me, madame; quite the contrary. And yet, it is said that contraries attract each other.

Countess. Mademoiselle, my dress.

Vic. Yes, madame.

Countess. Give me another collar. (*She sits down before her toilet table.*) This is hideous. (*To the Marquis.*) Be seated.

Vic. Madame shall have another, if she does not admire that, but it is very pretty. There is a wrinkle here—let me fix it.

(*She arranges the collar.*)

Countess. There, that is it. (*She examines it in the glass.*) That is better. Tell Madame Dufour to make another collar just like that, do you hear?

Vic. Yes, madame; when do you wish to have it?

Countess. When? To-morrow morning. There is no one to send but François, and I am in a great hurry.

Vic. I fear there will not be time.

Countess. Oh! yes, you always find it impossible to obey my orders, and still you claim to be very much attached to me.

Vic. That is the truth . . . Madame is angry.

Countess. Give me the rouge. Well, Monsieur de Valberg, you do not seem to be inclined to talk to-day.

Mar. But you do not listen to me, madame.

Countess (*arranging a ribbon*). Pardon me, I beg of you. You were speaking of contraries, were you not?

Mar. Contraries? Contracts, was it not?

Countess. Possibly. Victoire!

Vic. Madame.

Countess. I do not know what you can have to say about contracts.

Mar. Ah! I will tell you, madame, when you will listen to me.

Countess. I listen with pleasure.

Mar. Do you receive company to-day?

Countess. No, if you prefer not. These tiresome people from the village who take my park for a promenade, annoy me. Victoire, admit no one.

Vic. Yes, madame.

Mar. I am obliged to you, for I have something of a very serious nature to impart.

Countess (*to Victoire*). My sister-in-law, of course, is an exception.

Vic. Yes, madame.

Countess. She dotes upon you, Monsieur de Valberg.

Mar. And I think her charming! There are some women who please from the very first glance.

Countess. Victoire, you may also admit M. de Clairvaux.

Vic. Is that all?

Mar. Ah! madame, M. de Latour also, I beg of you.

Countess. M. de Latour? Very well, yes, M. de Latour.

Vic. Yes, madame.

Countess. Wait . . . Yesterday's list of callers.

Vic. But madame received everybody yesterday.

Countess. Do you think so?

Vic. I am certain of it.

Countess. Very well, in that case I shall receive everybody to-day.

Vic. Will madame have need of me?

Countess. No, but do not go far away. Let me know when my purchases arrive.

Scene V

(*The Marquis. The Countess.*)

Mar. You have been making some purchases?

Countess. Yes, for the winter.

Mar. You are fond of society, madame?

Countess. Certainly, above all things. You know how unhappy my husband made me when he shut me up for three years on one of his estates.

Mar. On one of his estates?

Countess. Yes, all the time except a tour down the Rhine.

Mar. The Rhine?

Countess. Yes.

Mar. Is the scenery fine?

Countess. I am sure I don't know; I did not look at it. Traveling is so unpleasant, and I do not see any difference between the various points of interest. The faculty of appreciation has been denied me. Châteaux, forests, rivers, especially churches, were everywhere pointed out to me. Those gothic churches make me shiver! I still dream about the time when, after a long day's ride in a carriage, Vernon entered my room with a picture of a cathedral. I was just sick of them.

Mar. That must have been very painful.

Countess. And then it was not enough to enter those damp, cave-like structures and break one's neck looking up at gothic arches; my husband's particular joy was to climb up to the spires, and drag me up after him. You know what hard work that is. One winds up a tortuous stairway, higher and higher, until one's head feels as though it was being pierced by a corkscrew, and the eyes close tight with terror. At that interesting moment your guide hands you a glass and asks you to admire the view! That is the way I saw Germany.

Mar. And yet that is the route we are going to take with the baron.

Countess. The baron? Is he here?

Mar. Yes, madame, he has just arrived. He came from Paris with that violent storm—that is what has spoiled our fine weather, surely.

Countess (*laughing*). The arrival of the baron? That is good!

Mar. Were you not speaking of him?

Countess (*laughing*). Yes, of course.

Mar. I sometimes make mistakes, and it is very annoying.

Countess. Oh! no . . . I enjoy it, I assure you.

(*She begins to search for something.*)

Mar. What are you looking for? Tobacco? I have some right here. (*He opens his tobacco box.*) Ah! I had nearly forgotten.

Countess. What?

Mar. This paper here. Guess.

Countess. I am not good at guessing; tell me at once.

Mar. Why, if you wish to remarry . . .

Countess (*searching about on the piano*). Well?

Mar. What are you looking for?

Countess (*still searching*). Pray continue.

Mar. You will be the happiest woman in the world with me.

Countess (*continuing her search*). With you?

Mar. Oh, surely.

Countess. I do not find it; where can it be?

Mar. What are you looking for?

Countess. A paper I left here just a moment ago.

Mar. Is it anything valuable?

Countess. Yes and no; it is a song.

Mar. I have a collection; if you care for it, I will loan it to you. It is very complete, since 1650.

Countess. It was a new song.

Mar. There are a great many in my collection.

Countess. New songs?

Mar. Yes, for that time.

Countess (*laughing*). For 1650! Ha! ha! You are always the same.

Mar. Yes, I am constant. That does not always succeed, as you know, with the ladies.

Countess. And do you complain of the ladies?

Mar. Ah! if you would consent to be mine . . . Here is a visitor.

Countess. It is your servant.

Scene VI

(*The Countess. The Marquis. Germain.*)

Ger. Pardon me, madame, I have brought my master a paper from the baron.

Mar. Indeed! what is it? Ah! madame, that is strange, but here is the very romanza I was thinking about. Is this what you were looking for?

Countess. Let me see; yes, this seems to be the very one; you must have taken it.

(*She sits down at the piano and plays.*)

Ger. (*aside*). I found it in the trunk. (*To the Marquis.*) Monsieur, the baron told me to ask you . . .

Mar. What is that? The baron?

Ger. If you were attending to your affairs.

Mar. Yes, and you have just upset them.

Ger. The baron has just received unpleasant news from Fontainebleau. He has returned to M. Duplessis, and appears much troubled.

Mar. Indeed?

Ger. Yes, I brought you that music in order to have an excuse for speaking to you; he wishes to have your reply at once.

Mar. (*reflecting*). You have done well. But it seems to me, madame, you are mistaken; that is not the one.

(*He goes to the piano.*)

Countess. I think it is. Just wait a minute.

(*She plays.*)

Ger. It seems to me they are not making much progress. The baron asked me to catch some words of their conversation.

(*He retires slowly.*)

Countess. You see how it goes.

Mar. Yes, but the words . . .

Countess. I do not care for the words.

Mar. The words are something like this:
(*He sings.*)

"Fanny, happy the mortal who breathes——"

Ger. (*near the door*). That is not the road to Gotha.

Mar. I have forgotten the rest, strange to say.

Countess. Very strange, with your memory!

Mar. Yes, I can generally remember when I try.

Scene VII

(*Countess. Marquis. Germain. Victoire.*)

Vic. The purchases have come, madame.

Countess. Good.

Mar. Some one to see you? Do not let me detain you.

Countess. Will you not come with me? You can give me the benefit of your advice.

Mar. No, I must see some one on business.

Countess. Here, in my house?

Mar. Yes, it is you, by the way.

Countess. I?

Mar. Yes, did I not tell you about it?

Countess. What?

Mar. That I desire to marry you.

Countess. I do not know when.

Mar. Just this moment; I came here for that special purpose.

Countess. I do not remember it.

Mar. What could you have been thinking of? Your distractions are most bewildering. Yet it seems to me . . .

Countess. Yes?

Mar. That I spoke of my journey.

Countess. What journey?

Mar. To Germany.

Countess. No, it was I who spoke of mine.

Mar. What do you mean?

Countess. Why, my tour down the Rhine with my husband.

Mar. I beg your pardon . . .

Countess. Come, see my purchases.

Mar. (*on the way out*). But I . . .

Countess (*the same*). But I tell you . . .

Scene VIII

(*Germain. Victoire.*)

Ger. Mam'selle Victoire, what do you say to that? You know that he loves her.

Vic. And I know that she loves him.

Ger. And that he wishes to marry her.

Vic. And that she asks nothing better.

Ger. Are you certain of it?

Vic. Perfectly.

Ger. But you do not know that we are going on an embassy.

Vic. Where?

Ger. To Gotha. It appears that the duchess is in confinement, and we are going to congratulate her for His Majesty.

Vic. What has that to do with it?

Ger. This: My master is anxious to have the countess say yes or no before his departure, in order to get the matter off his mind. We are to start to-morrow morning with the baron, and it would take but a word to decide everything; instead of saying that word, they spend their time singing.

Vic. However, he has spoken about traveling and marriage.

Ger. And she replies with a song.

Vic. Why does not your baron come to the rescue?

Ger. For fear of spoiling everything, as he thinks your mistress does not like him.

Vic. Monsieur Germain.

Ger. Mam'selle Victoire.

Vic. Our masters are big children; we must help them out. You brought a paper, did you not?

Ger. Yes, a piece of music.

Vic. Give it to me, and now . . .

(*She writes on the sheet of music.*)

Ger. What are you writing there?

Vic. Never mind. Put this on the piano.

Ger. (*reading*). But they will be provoked.

Vic. Never fear. She dreams of him all day long, and what is more . . .

Ger. Here they come! Let us fly!

Vic. And listen!

Scene IX

(*The Countess. The Marquis.*)

Countess. Do you like my red silk?

Mar. (*book in hand*). No, it is not what I would have chosen.

(*Reading.*)

"Fanny, happy the mortal who breathes——"

Countess. Now that you have your book in your hand, I suppose you can rely on your memory.

Mar. Oh! I do not rely on the book; it would have come to me sooner or later.

(*Reading.*)

"Fanny, happy the mortal who breathes at thy side
The air of sweet innocence. He knows full well
What hosts of the blessed in heaven reside."

Countess. How beautifully you recite!

Mar. It is not difficult, madame, to express what one feels at the bottom of one's heart, and

these verses seem to have been written purposely for this moment . . .

"Fanny, happy the mortal——"

Countess. You find something amusing in those verses.

Mar. No, I swear on my soul and by all that is sacred that I consider them charming.

Countess. Well, come, sing them; I will accompany you.

(*She sits down at the piano.*)

Mar. (*at her side*). You shall see, madame, that I can repeat those lines without the book. What are you thinking about, madame?

Countess. That red silk; you do not like it?

Mar. I prefer that faded-leaf taffeta.

Countess. It is out of style.

Mar. It appears to be quite new.

Countess. There are some things that are always *passé.*

Mar. That remark is essentially feminine.

Countess. How feminine?

Mar. You ladies have a mania for the new, for the novel.

Countess. You are polite.

Mar. Outside of the present moment you know nothing. You care nothing for what is old, and you take no thought of the morrow. I assure you that if I were married my wife should not have so many whims.

Countess. You would make her wear a dress of faded-leaf taffeta?

Mar. Yes, if that happened to suit my taste.

Countess. She would laugh at you and refuse to wear it.

Mar. She would wear it all her life, madame, if she loved me truly.

Countess. If that is your opinion, you will never marry.

Mar. Are you serious, madame?

Countess. Yes, I advise you to give up your search for a victim.

Mar. Oh, heavens! you pronounce my death sentence.

Countess. Why your death sentence?

Mar. I am not like you, madame; it is not necessary to tell me a thing twice. Oh! I fear that word, and, although I foresaw it, I did not expect to hear it. It drives me to despair, it overwhelms me . . . in Heaven's name! do not repeat it.

Countess. Why, what is the matter with you?

Mar. Do you think I can live separated from you, far from all that is dear to me? Such life would be unbearable. You may laugh as much as you please. I know very well that you will say that a journey undertaken in such haste is always disagreeable; that, if I have my plans, you also have yours. You will find a hundred objections, but how can one count the obstacles

in the path of true love? Does your lawsuit disturb you? I assure you it is as good as won. I have called on your attorney twenty times. He lives at some distance from here, but what does that matter? That is not what troubles you—no, madame, you do not love me.

Countess. I beg your pardon, but what is the meaning of this strange effusion?

Mar. I speak nothing but the exact truth, but, since you do not care to hear it, I shall retire. Adieu, madame.

Countess. You should know, marquis, that your vagaries are amusing only when they are not serious. When you take a neighbor's hat by mistake, or when you call the curé, mademoiselle, no one thinks of getting angry; but all that should not encourage you to lose all your senses and to talk about a taffeta dress as though you were thinking of drowning yourself; for you should know that when it reaches that point, merriment gives place to patience, and patience is something no man should care to demand of a woman; it is woman's mortal enemy.

Mar. That is to say, I have become importunate. Another reason why I should go away.

Countess. Truly, you are losing your mind.

Mar. Worse and worse. How unhappy I am!

Countess. Do you not remain to supper?

Mar. No, I am going away . . . Adieu, madame.

(*He sits down in a corner.*)

Countess. By my faith, you may do as you wish, for you are unendurable and incomprehensible. Please hand me my music. But what is this?

(*She reads in a low voice the words written on the piece of music.*)

Mar. (*seated*). She whom I love so tenderly! How have I displeased her? What have I done to offend her? I came here with a heart full of love for her, ready to consecrate my life to her; I confess frankly the love I feel for her; I ask for her hand in good faith, and she cruelly repulses me. It is inconceivable! The more I reflect on it the less I understand it. (*He rises and paces up and down the room.*) I must have committed some unpardonable sin.

Countess (*handing him the paper as he passes before her*). There, Valberg, read that.

Mar. (*aside*). Unpardonable? It can not be. She will surely forgive me. Come, Germain, we must go. Yes, I must see her again. She is so good, so indulgent, so gracious and so beautiful! There is no one comparable to her.

Countess (*aside*). I will wait until this passes off.

Mar. (*aside*). Would her habitual absent-mindedness, her vagaries, be such as a reasonable

man could endure? Has she that calm presence of mind, that equable temperament necessary to the proper discharge of household duties? I would have much to teach that woman.

Countess. That is worth listening to.

Mar. But she is such a fine musician! . . . Germain! . . . Ah! how happy we would be, alone in some peaceful retreat, with some friends about us, for I would be sure to love every one she loves.

Countess. Indeed!

Mar. But no, she loves society and its distractions . . . Germain! . . . Very well, I would not be jealous. Who would be jealous of such a woman? . . . Germain! . . . I would learn to love those pleasures which bore me; I would take pride in seeing her admired; I would be proud of her as a part of myself, and if she should ever deceive me . . . Germain! . . . I would plunge a dagger into her heart.

Countess (*taking his hand*). Oh! no, Monsieur de Valberg.

Mar. Is it you, countess? Heavens! I did not think . . .

Countess. Before telling me read this.

Mar. What is it? (*He reads.*) "The marquis is requested to remember that he is to marry the countess before setting out for Germany." Very well, madame, you see that it was I and not you who spoke of that journey.

Countess. But is it true, are you going?

Mar. How can you ask? For two hours I have been repeating it over and over.

Countess. You have taken my maid for me, for those lines were written by her.

Mar. Indeed? She writes very well.

Countess. Yes, but she is very impertinent.

Mar. Not at all; that was just what I was thinking of.

Countess. But what are you going to do in Germany?

Mar. Present the king's compliments to the grand duchess.

Countess. And when do you start?

Mar. To-morrow morning.

Countess. Then you wish to marry me on the way?

Mar. Yes, I would like to take you with me. What a delightful journey that would make!

Countess. An elopement?

Mar. Yes, in a way.

Countess. That would be jolly.

Mar. We would publish our bans . . .

Countess. At each relay. And the witnesses?

Mar. We have my uncle.

Countess. And our relatives?

Mar. They would ask nothing more.

Countess. And the world?

Mar. What could the world say? We are

honest people, and we shall not be arrested as rogues merely because we take a carriage and start for Germany.

Countess. Your plan is so absurd, so extravagant, that it amuses me.

Mar. Let us follow it; it is very simple.

Countess. I am almost tempted.

Mar. And I am enchanted. Hello! Germain!

(*Enter Germain.*)

Ger. You called, monsieur? (*Aside.*) I believe the danger is past.

Mar. Go, quick, get that large trunk in the middle of my room, and bring it here.

Ger. Here, monsieur?

Mar. Yes, make haste.

(*Exit Germain.*)

Countess (*laughing*). Oh! what folly! You have sent him after your trunk?

Mar. Yes, we must get our things ready to pack at once; when one has a good idea, I believe it is best to carry it out at once.

Countess. One moment, marquis; before setting out at full speed for the East Indies, it would be well to get a passport. Are you sure that I am endowed with all those qualities essential to the proper discharge of the household duties in some of your castles in Spain?

Mar. In Spain? I do not understand.

Countess. Have I that calm presence of

mind, that equable temperament so desirable in a house the master of which possesses the qualities in such perfection?

Mar. Now, you are joking. Need I repeat to you what all the world knows, that you possess all the desirable qualities, all talents and every grace?

Countess. But you forget that I am a coquette, an idler, particularly that I am absent-minded . . .

Mar. Who says that, madame?

Countess. One of my friends.

Mar. He is an impertinent fellow.

Countess. Not always. He is quite original, and makes portraits before his mirror which he paints to suit his own fancy. Guess who it is. He is a diplomat and something of a musician; a poet and a connoisseur in silk goods, a dangerous hunter for—his neighbor's hedge; redoubtable at whist—for his partner; an intelligent man, who makes stupid errors; a gallant man withal, a considerate lover, who, to win his lady's heart, pays her compliments by intention and insults by distraction.

Mar. If I have ever done such things, madame, it is for the last time, and you shall see on this journey . . .

Countess. But have I consented to this journey?

Mar. You have said yes.

Countess. I almost said yes. Between those two words there is a world of difference.

Mar. If you will but consent, madame, that portrait you have just drawn shall no longer resemble me. Yes, if it is a true picture to-day, I protest that it is your fault. It was doubt and fear, hope and anxiety, that prevented me from seeing or understanding anything that was not you. Do not do me the injustice of supposing that I would have lost my reason if I had loved you less; I have lost it in your eyes; a word from you will restore it.

Countess. What you say leads me to suppose that, without knowing it, we have stolen each other's reason. You are, you say, distracted by your love for me; perhaps I am bewildered by my friendship for you. Do you think we ought mutually to repair the damage we have done? Since I have taken your good sense and you mine, shall we govern our collective conduct by reciprocal counsel? That would be an excellent method of regaining great wisdom.

Mar. I wish nothing more than to obey you.

Countess. It is not a matter of obedience, but of simple exchange. For instance, I am an idler, you say . . .

Mar. But, madame . . .

Countess. You said so, and I agree with you. While you, on the contrary, are very active; you

return from your morning's ride before I am ready to rise; your fingers are always covered with ink, and it is difficult for me to write. And with reading it is the same; you devour everything even to tragedies with ferocious appetite, while I sleep through the best of them. In society you hardly know what to do with yourself; you have not a word to say to any one, you talk to yourself without caring who may hear you; as for me, I confess I love conversation. I enjoy hearing myself talk so much that some people will have nothing to do with me, and while you are off in a corner communing with your inner self I bask in the glare of the lighted ballroom. Would not all these contrasts make a picture? Find a frame with which to surround it, you with your faded-leaf taffeta, I with my red silk, our good qualities above our defects; there we can exchange our rôles, playing now the blind man and now the dog who leads him. Would it not be a fine example to place before the world a man whose love would impel him to renounce his masculine prerogative of command, and a woman sacrificing her cherished tradition of independence?

Mar. You charm me, you transport me. Oh! madame, if I were but worthy to consecrate my life to you, to give my life for you.

Countess. Oh! pray do not do that; what good would that do me?

(*Enter Germain with the trunk.*)

Ger. Here is your trunk, monsieur.

Mar. And my uncle?

Ger. He has not returned from M. Duplessis'.

Mar. Well, madame?

Countess. Well, let us try . . .

Mar. Quick, Germain, François, Victoire; bring everything here.

Countess. Is that the way you express your gratitude?

Mar. Oh! madame, there will be plenty of time for that.

Countess. How plenty of time?

Mar. I shall do nothing else from this day to the end of my life.

(*Enter Victoire.*)

Vic. Does madame require my services?

Countess. It was you, mademoiselle, who dared . . .

Mar. Do not scold her. If I had the wealth of Crœsus I would give it to her.

(*He gives her his purse.*)

Countess. Is this that sensible man I have heard so much about?

Mar. Oh! madame, spare me to-day. Put your music right here.

Countess. A good beginning.

Mar. (*arranging the music*). Every one loves music in Germany. We shall find connoisseurs

in that country. I anticipate the pleasure of hearing you sing for them.

(*He sings.*)

"Fanny, happy the mortal."

They will fall in love with you, those fine people—Germain!

Ger. Monsieur?

Mar. Go bring me my violin.

(*Exit Germain.*)

Countess. Do not forget that romanza.

Mar. It shall remind me of the happiest day of my life.

Countess. And my taffeta dress? Victoire!

Vic. Yes, madame.

(*She brings the dress, Germain the violin a little later.*)

Mar. You wish to take it?

Countess. Yes, since it is one of your conditions.

Mar. Oh! that is how I displeased you. Bring the other, mademoiselle.

(*He throws it on a chair.*)

Countess. Let us not take all of these things along, nothing but what we need; we can buy all sorts of things in Germany.

Mar. Very well—Germain!

Ger. Monsieur.

Mar. My gun and my hunting horn; yes, we can buy the other things at Gotha.

Countess. At Gotha?

Mar. Yes, that is where we are going.

Countess. Here, take this little box.

Mar. What does it contain? Family papers? (*Examining it.*) No, it is tea; but we can find that anywhere.

Countess. I do not like any tea but this.

Mar. What a happy time we shall have.

Countess. We shall buy German costumes while we are there; they will be just the thing for a masque ball.

Mar. Madame, shall we take my sun-dial with us? It keeps very good time.

Countess. The idea! Valberg, where are all your fine promises?

Mar. You are right; my watch will suffice.

(*He puts it in the trunk.*)

Countess. I must watch you, now that you have become a diplomat.

Mar. Oh! have no fears, I shall shine in the rôle. (*He picks up various objects here and there and puts them in the trunk. While talking he throws in his portfolio, his gloves, his handkerchief and his hat.*) I went to Denmark once, and succeeded very well. My uncle, who thinks he is a genius, tries to instruct me, but he is none too thoughtful himself; between you and me, his mind sometimes wanders.

(*Closing the trunk.*)

Countess. There!

Scene X

(*The Countess. The Marquis. The Baron. Germain. Victoire.*)

Baron. Madame, I beg your pardon for entering thus unannounced, but an unforeseen circumstance . . .

Countess. You are entirely welcome.

Mar. Oh! my dear uncle, embrace me. You may also embrace madame. It is all over, everything is forgotten—I mean everything is settled. You may imagine how happy I am.

Baron. Alas! my nephew, all is lost. The Grand Duchess of Gotha is dead.

Mar. That is unfortunate; our trunk is all ready.

Baron. I have just learned the sad news from M. Duplessis.

Countess. What, Valberg, must we give up our journey? I had set my heart on it.

Mar. Just heavens! Do you forsake me?

Countess. No, but take me somewhere.

Mar. To Italy, madame, to Turkey, to Norway if you desire.

Baron. Who could have anticipated such a sad event? All my arrangements had been made; I had the royal letters, the gifts, I had

prepared for everything, foreseen everything; this is the only thing I had not counted on!

Mar. Yes, yes; what does the proverb say? "One can not think of everything."

(*End of One Can Not Think of Everything.*)

BETTINE

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

(1851)

CHARACTERS

The Marquis Stefani.
The Baron de Steinberg.
Calabre, *Valet to the Baron.*
The Notary, *Capsucefalo.*
A Servant.
Bettine, *Italian Prima Donna.*
The Scene is Laid in Italy.

Scene I

The drawing-room of a country house. (*Calabre. The notary.*)

Calabre. Come this way, notary. This way, Signor Capsucefalo. Kindly go in there, into the summerhouse.

The Notary. And the contracting parties, where are they?

Calabre. You will have to be so good as to wait a few minutes, if you please. Will you not have something cool to drink? It is not very far from the town, but it is hot weather.

The Notary. Yes, and I came afoot, under a blazing sun; but I do not see the contracting parties.

Calabre. My mistress is not up yet.

The Notary. What? it is past noon!

Calabre. Then she will not be much longer in appearing.

The Notary. And Baron de Steinberg, is he up yet?

Calabre. He is away hunting.

The Notary. Hunting! Well, on my word, this is a strange way of getting married. I am called upon to draw up a contract. I am summoned for a special hour, and, when I appear, the lady is sleeping and the gentleman is off hunting. You will admit, my dear Calabre, that . . .

Calabre. You see, my dear sir, that we do not live like everybody else. Our mistress is an artist, you know.

The Notary. Yes, and a great artist. She sings exceedingly well. I have never heard her sing, but I have heard her spoken about, you understand.

Calabre. Only last night, she sang until three o'clock in the morning. Are you fond of music, sir?

The Notary. Certainly, sir, in so far as my duties will permit. So you were having a large reception, a great many guests?

Calabre. No; there were just the two of them. Our mistress and the baron, and they had a fine concert, just the two of them together, and

it was not the first time either. It has become a habit with mistress since she left the stage. At daybreak she went to bed, and the baron went hunting.

The Notary. You may say what you like about it, but it seems to me a most peculiar way of doing things. Hunting and music are all very well in their place, but when people get married, sir, they *get* married. And now, where are the witnesses?

Calabre. Master said that he would bring them. Have just a little patience. What is wanted?

A Servant (*entering*). A letter from the princess, sir.

Calabre (*taking the letter*). Very well. You know that master is not at home.

The Servant. There is a man there on horseback.

Calabre. Let him wait. Ah, here is the baron.

Scene II

(*The same. Steinberg.*)

Steinberg. She is not up yet? How very indolent! Good morning, "Cefalo." You are prompt, and I too, as you see, but the signora is far from it.

The Notary. Here is the contract, baron, in

this portfolio. If you will be so good, while we are waiting, as to glance . . .

Steinberg. Presently. What is this letter?

Calabre. It is from the princess, sir.

Steinberg (*opening the letter*). Ah, let us see about this.

The Notary. I shall retire, sir, and await your orders.

Scene III

(*Steinberg. Calabre.*)

Calabre (*aside*). If it is some invitation again, or pleasure trip that is being proposed we shall have a thunderstorm.

Steinberg (*reading*). What? What is that that you are muttering?

Calabre. I, sir? I did not say a word.

Steinberg. Calabre, you presume altogether too much. You give yourself important airs, pretending that you are holding something in reserve. It does not please me in the least, I give you warning.

Calabre. Is it wrong not to say . . .

Steinberg. Certainly, when it is mere affectation. When by refraining from speaking you give it to be understood, that you might say something, if you would only speak.

Calabre. Of whom should I speak, sir? Is it my fault if the princess . . .

Steinberg. Well, what is it? what do you mean? Always the princess! What is the trouble? We have been staying in this house for a month. The princess is our neighbor and her palace is only a step or two away; why should it be astonishing, why should it be strange if there exists between us neighborly, even friendly, if you wish, relations? We are not in France, where you could live for ten years on the same floor as your neighbor without bowing to him when you meet him; nor are we in England where you would not tell a man that he had dropped his purse unless you had been properly and formally introduced to him. We are in Italy, where people are free and friendly, and exempt from that haughtiness which is the invention of bashful pride to give greater credit to ennui. We are in a land of charming, brave, courteous, and hospitable liberty, under the glorious sun where the shadow of one man, in spite of all that may be said, has never yet inconvenienced another; where you form a friendship by asking your way, and where, finally, bad temper is as little known as bad weather.

Calabre. Sir, you take it very seriously. I beg your pardon, sir, but the opinion of a poor fellow like me is not worth taking into consideration.

Steinberg. What is this opinion? I wish to know it. Tell me what you think; I insist.

Calabre. Oh, sir, it is not very important. Only when you go away like that and spend a whole day with the princess, it has sometimes seemed to me that mistress is very sad.

Steinberg. Is that all?

Calabre. That is all I know, sir; but I must confess . . .

Steinberg. What?

Calabre. Nothing, sir, I have nothing more to say.

Steinberg. Will you speak when I insist?

Calabre. Well, sir, to tell the truth, it does hurt me. She does love you so!

Steinberg. She loves me so!

Calabre. Oh, yes, sir, almost as much as I love you. If you only knew when you are away all the questions that she asks me, and how often she slips something into my hand to try to persuade me to tell her what you say, what you really think, if you still love her, if you are faithful to her. . . . You accuse me of being talkative, . . . well, sir! just ask her what I have to say about my master, and if ever I say the slightest word that could reflect upon him—that is why I dare to say that it hurts me to see things so, when I know how she feels about it. Yes, sir, and when I see her in tears. . . . But, after all, since you are going to marry her . . .

Steinberg. Calabre! my poor, old Calabre!

Calabre. What is it, sir?

Steinberg. This marriage . . .

Calabre. Yes, sir.

Steinberg. Well, I know that I am pledged. I have not thought it over. I did not wish to give myself a chance to think it over. I allowed myself to be carried away, or, to speak more correctly, I deceived myself. I gave way. I shut my eyes to everything. I was simply dazed by my passion for her. . . .

Calabre. I beg your pardon again, sir, but . . .

Steinberg (*rising*). Listen to what I have to say. Bettine is an exquisitely charming woman; with her talent, her brilliant reputation, in the midst of all the pleasures and temptations which surround and besiege a popular actress, she was able to live so circumspectly that slander never dared to attack her, and the purity of her heart is as visible as the clear purity of her eyes. Certainly, if nothing stood in the way, no one would be better able than she to make a husband happy, but . . .

Calabre. Well, sir, if that is how things are, . . . why then? . . .

Steinberg. You ask such a question? Do you know what it is to marry a prima donna?

Calabre. No, for my own part, I have not the faintest idea. It seems to me, however, . . .

Steinberg. What?

Calabre. That if you were to marry the lady there could be no great harm done. It seems to me that there are plenty of such instances. She is young and beautiful. Her reputation, as you were saying, is excellent. She is rich and you are too.

Steinberg. Are you sure of it?

Calabre. You are so generous! . . .

Steinberg. An additional proof that I am not rich. I was rich, but I am so no longer.

Calabre. Is it possible, sir?

Steinberg. Yes, Calabre, when I cared for nothing but pleasure, whatever my dissipations cost me I did not regret: I have no idea how much it was, but since love has come to complicate matters, it is ruinous. Nothing is so expensive as women who cost nothing, . . . and with cards into the bargain. . . .

Calabre. So you are still playing, sir?

Steinberg. No longer ago than yesterday.

Calabre. With the princess? And you lost . . .

Steinberg. Five hundred louis, but that is not what is ruining me. I can pay that this morning, and I am counting on winning them back, too. But I tell you, I am ruined. My last sou is gone and I have nothing to live on.

Calabre. If that can be really true, and if you are in any embarrassment, sir, there are my small savings. . . .

Steinberg. Thank you, but I have not reached that point yet. You did not understand what I meant. My fortune being half gone . . .

Calabre. It seems to me, then, that it would be just the thing . . .

Steinberg. To get married, I suppose? Others than you could give me this advice, and others than I could follow it. That is exactly the motive! the reason which it is impossible to give, but impossible to forget, which compels me to leave Bettine. . . .

Calabre. To leave our mistress? You can not mean it, sir?

Steinberg. What would you have me do? It was my intention, that when I married her, she should leave the stage. But if I am not rich enough for that, you would not have me follow her, dance attendance in the wings? . . . What is wanted? What is it?

Scene IV

(*The same. A servant.*)

The Servant. Sir, it is a card that I am taking to my mistress.

Steinberg. She is not up yet.

The Servant. I beg your pardon, sir.

(*Singing is heard in the wings.*)

Steinberg. You are right, let me see the card. The Marquis Stéfani! What is that?

The Servant. Sir, a gentleman who is walking in the garden.

Steinberg. In the garden?

The Servant. Only look, sir, there he is beside the fountain, looking at the goldfish. He says that he has just returned from a long journey.

Steinberg. Well, what does he wish?

The Servant. He wishes to see my mistress, and he is waiting until she can receive him.

Steinberg (*aside*). Stéfani, I know that name. (*Aloud.*) Calabre, is not that the Stéfani who was so much talked about in Florence?

Calabre. Why, . . . yes, sir. . . . I think so, at least.

Steinberg (*looking out on the balcony*). That is exactly who it is; I recognize him. He was a regular feature of the greenrooms, supposed to be a great connoisseur, a warm admirer of the Signora Bettine.

Calabre. He is very rich, too, sir, and an important person.

Steinberg. Yes, he is a patrician engaged in mercantile pursuits after the ancient custom of Venice. But it has not been proved that his appreciation of the signora was restricted to admiration. You will be so good, Calabre, as to

tell Bettine that I request her not to see that man. I am going out and I shall return shortly.

Calabre. You are going to play cards again, sir?

Steinberg. Do as I tell you, do you understand?

Calabre. Yes, sir.

(*He goes out.*)

Scene V

(*Calabre. The Notary. Then Bettine.*)

Calabre (*aside*). Things are going badly, very badly. Poor young lady, so good and so beautiful!

The Notary. Calabre, I have been waiting for some time now in the summerhouse, but I do not see the contracting parties.

Calabre. Presently, sir.

The Notary. And the witnesses?

Calabre. I told you that the baron would bring them.

Bettine (*comes in singing*). Ah, there you are, notary, my dear notary, my dear friend. Have you all your formidable papers ready?

The Notary. Yes, madame, the contract is ready. I have only left the blank spaces for the sums which have not been specified.

Bettine. You will not name any great amount, even if you specify all that I possess.

Have you not seen Filippo Valle who has charge of my business affairs? He must have given you your instructions on that point.

The Notary. Surely you are but jesting. The baron is known to be extremely wealthy.

Bettine. Oh, I do not know anything about it. But, by the way, where is he?

Calabre. He has gone out, my lady, just for a moment.

Bettine. Gone out now? You are dreaming!

Calabre. That is to say, . . . I do not know exactly. . . .

Bettine. Go look for him, then. . . . Signor Capsucefalo, wait for us in the summer-house.

The Notary. I have just come from it, madame, and I obey your orders. (*To Calabre.*) How charming great artists are! Did you notice how kindly and familiarly she spoke to me, and called me her dear friend?

Calabre. It is her way when she is pleased.

The Notary. Hum! You promised me something in the way of refreshments.

Bettine. Why, certainly. (*To Calabre.*) Of what can you be thinking?

Calabre. Oh, I forgot, madame.

Bettine. Hurry now, lemons, sugar, good cold water, or coffee, chocolate, anything he cares for. Perhaps he is hungry. Be quick, now; a bottle of muscatel, and a good big dish of macaroni.

The Notary. Madame, I am exceedingly grateful.

(*He withdraws, after making several profound bows.*)

Bettine (*to Calabre*). Well, now; what are you doing there? You look exactly like a donkey that is being curried. I told you to go and look for Steinberg. See! there he is in the garden.

Calabre. Pardon me, madame. It is not he.

Bettine. Who is it then? Ah, what a joyful sight! it is Stéfani, my dear Stéfani! Has he been there long? Tell him to come, hurry up.

Calabre. He has doubtless seen you, madame; he is coming up the steps, but I must tell you that the baron . . .

Bettine. Oh, how happy I am! What is it that you were saying about the baron?

Calabre. I was just going to say that the baron charged me . . .

Bettine. Do speak out.

Calabre. The baron charged me to ask you . . .

Bettine. Oh, you will be the death of me with your roundabout way of getting at things!

Calabre. Not to receive this gentleman.

Bettine. Who? Stéfani? You are losing your mind.

Calabre. No, madame, the baron particularly charged me . . .

Bettine (*laughing*). Why, you are mad. . . . The poor fellow does not know what he is saying, that is evident. He is rambling in his talk. Not receive Stéfani! an old friend, whom I love with my whole heart! Ah, here he is! Go away quickly, go and look for Steinberg.

Calabre (*aside, going out*). What can I do to help things? There is nothing that I can do. Things are going badly, very badly.

Scene VI

(*Bettine. The Marquis.*)

Bettine (*going to meet the Marquis*). And since when have you been in this country? And by what happy chance, my dear Marquis? How are you, what are you doing? What has become of you? You look well, . . . how overjoyed I am to see you!

The Marquis. And I too, lady fair, I am delighted, I am charmed! But, as soon as I see you, that is perfectly natural.

Bettine. Compliments! You have not changed, I see.

The Marquis. I shall not say the same of you, for you are more beautiful than ever; and do you know that it is something like two or three years since I last saw you?

Bettine. Dear Stéfani, if you only knew what is just about to happen here! I am to be married! . . . Have you lunched yet?

The Marquis. Yes, assuredly! You know me too well to think me capable of setting forth without having taken . . .

Bettine. Your precautions. But do tell me where you have just come from?

The Marquis. From next door. From the home of the princess, your neighbor.

Bettine. Ah, she is a friend of yours? She is said to be exceedingly attractive.

The Marquis. Oh, yes, she is very attractive. It was she who, by chance, let me know that you were here. I had not dreamed of it, so I hastened over. And you are to be married?

Bettine. Yes, my friend, this very day.

The Marquis. This very day?

Bettine. The notary even is here.

The Marquis. Good! so much the better; that is a bit of good news. That is well, very well. I was not expecting it, but I am delighted.

Bettine. You were not expecting it? Well, that certainly is a flattering compliment. Did you come here simply to reflect upon me, Marquis?

The Marquis. Not at all, not at all, fair lady; Heaven forbid! How very like you that is! There you are already with your eyes sparkling. Do be calm. I know that you are prudent, very

prudent. I respect you as much as I love you—that is to say, I know you. You have a certain way. . . .

Bettine. What kind of way?

The Marquis. Yes, a way. (*He looks at her.*) A charming way, full of grace, of delicacy, of wit, of imagination, which understands everything, which misses nothing, and which would be in keeping with the dignity of a crown if need be, . . . witness the last act of "Cinderella."

Bettine. Yes, you loved to see me in my glory.

The Marquis. True. With your gray frock it was useless for you to sing like an angel. When I saw you crouched down in the ashes I always longed to rush upon the stage to thrash your father, and to carry you off in my coach.

Bettine. Heavens! Marquis! what rashness!

The Marquis. Also when I used to see you coming back in your gorgeous robe, woven in gold, with your three diadems, one above the other, blazing with diamonds . . .

Bettine. And I sang much better, did I not?

The Marquis. I can not tell about that, but it was beautiful. Tra, tra, how does it go?

Bettine (*sings the first bars of the final song of "la Cenerentola." Then stops suddenly and says*). How far off that all seems now!

The Marquis. What are you saying? Do you mean that you are giving up the theater?

Bettine. Oh, it is necessary. Do you think that my husband, I say my husband, for he will be presently, would let me go back on the stage again? That would be impossible, Marquis. Just think of it seriously for a moment.

The Marquis. It all depends upon people's tastes and ideas. But at least you are not giving up music.

Bettine. Ah, I wonder! Do you suppose that I could? We live on it here, my dear Marquis. And when you do us the honor of dining with us here we will give you as much as you like . . . more than you like.

The Marquis. I defy you to do that, but at the same time it breaks my heart to think that I shall no longer be able after this to go and snuggle down in that dear little corner where I used to stay, to give myself the delight of hearing you.

Bettine. Yes, you were one of my faithful friends.

The Marquis. Indeed, that is one of my boasts. The lamplighter used to give me a little nod every evening as he hung up his last lamp, for I never failed to arrive at that very moment. My word, I was one of the house!

Bettine. Better than that, Marquis. I well remember that you were my chivalrous knight.

The Marquis. True, against that great booby of an officer.

Bettine. Who hissed me in "Tancred."

The Marquis. Exactly. I challenged him, and was repaid by a good sword cut. Ah, those were happy days!

Bettine. Yes. Ah, me! How far off it seems!

The Marquis. That seems to be your refrain. What shall I say, then, I who am old?

Bettine. You, Marquis, how can you? Victor Hugo wrote the line for you when he said that upon the heart there are no wrinkles.

The Marquis. Ah, yes indeed, yes indeed, I notice them, and do you know why, Bettine? Because I am beginning to love my memories better than I should. It is very wrong. I had promised myself all my life that I should never fall into that bad habit. I have seen so many men of broad spirit become unjust, so many connoisseurs become incurable through this unfortunate effect of years, that I vowed that I should remain impartial toward modern things as toward the old. I did not wish to resemble those worthy people who are like the bells of Boileau:

"To honor the dead make the living to die."

Well! it is all quite useless. I love now, far better, that which I have loved than that which I love at present. I have nothing to say against

your modern composers, but Rossini is the man for me. Here walked the great Pasta with his gestures which made him seem like an antique statue; there warbled the nightingale that Rubini had in his throat; I see old Garcia with his haughty bearing, escorted by the long nose of Pellegrini; Lablache has made me laugh, Malibran has made me weep, and what, in Heaven's name, would you have me do about it?

Bettine. I can not see that you are so greatly in the wrong. I, too, love my memories.

The Marquis. How can you have any at your age?

Bettine. Why not, Marquis? If your memories are older than mine, there is nothing to prevent their being alike.

The Marquis. Oh! yours were born yesterday. They are nothing but growing children. Sooner or later you will come back to the theater.

Bettine. Never, dear Stéfani, never.

The Marquis. But consider, in those days were you not happy?

Bettine. Rather say I did not give thought to anything. Because—ah! then I had not loved.

The Marquis. What do you mean by that?

Bettine. What I say. I was a little bit foolish, it is true, careless, coquettish, if you will. But is it not our privilege, I should like to know? However, I have been none of all that since I felt my heart.

The Marquis. Love has brought you back to reason! In Heaven's name, do prove that! It is enough to drive one mad merely for the purpose of trying to effect a cure after your manner. Then you love him very much, this Monsieur de—de . . . you have not told me . . .

Bettine. Do I love him! My dear friend, how cold words are, how insignificant, how paltry speech is when one is trying to say how much one loves. You can not imagine our happiness, you can not have any idea of it.

The Marquis. Yes indeed, yes indeed, excuse me.

Bettine. My life is a regular romance. Were you not saying a few moments ago yourself that you sometimes wished to carry me off?

The Marquis. Yes, deuce take it all!

Bettine. Well, that is what he did. Just imagine what an inexpressible charm it had. We left everything. We started off together in a *poste-chaise* like two birds of the air, without considering, or thinking of, anything. I broke all my engagements and he sacrificed all his career. I drove my managers to distraction. . . .

The Marquis. Really, you spoke truly when you said that love had made you wise!

Bettine. Well! what would you have, when people are in love? Just think, Marquis, we did not see anything, not a city, nor a mountain, nor a palace, nor the smallest cathedral, not a

public building, not the smallest statue, not the tiniest picture!

The Marquis. That is a new way of taking a trip in Italy!

Bettine. Is it not, Marquis, when people are in love? But what did we care about your old curiosities. If you only knew how good he is, how kind; how well he did care for me! Ah, what a trip it was! Just think of it! I, who used to yawn whenever I took a trip by rail, even if I went only as far as Saint-Denis, I traversed four hundred leagues as if I were in a dream. Your Italy! he who wishes may see it, but I defy any one to traverse it as we did! We went by like an arrow, and we came straight here.

The Marquis. Why here, to this place in the country?

Bettine. Why? I do not know particularly . . . because he wished it . . because he had rented this country house . . . what should I say . . . I do not know anything about it . . . I should have been just as willing to go somewhere else . . . to the ends of the earth . . . anywhere at all, it would not have mattered. I stopped here because, when we alighted before the doorway, he said to me: "Here we are at the end of our journey."

The Marquis. Why did he not marry you in Paris?

Bettine. His family were opposed to the marriage. That was another of the hundred thousand obstacles . . .

The Marquis. You have not told me his name yet.

Bettine. Oh, I have not told you? It is because it seems to me everybody knows him. His name is Steinberg.

The Marquis. But that is not a French name.

Bettine. No, but his family lives in France.

The Marquis. Are you sure of it?

Bettine. Oh, he told me so.

The Marquis. Steinberg! I know about him. It even seems to me that I should be able to recall certain circumstances, and not any too pleasant ones . . . Good gracious! it is he whom I saw this morning.

Bettine. Where? Do tell me about it! With the princess?

The Marquis. That is it exactly, with the princess.

Bettine. Ah, the wretched woman! He is there still!

The Marquis. Why, what is the trouble, my dear friend?

Bettine. He is there still, that is evident. That is why he does not come. He is there still, on a day like this, when everything is ready, when the notary is here, when I am waiting for him. . . . Oh, what an outrage!

The Marquis. You are becoming vexed over a trifle.

Bettine. Over a trifle? Where is your heart? You do not resent the insult which has been offered me? And this impertinent servant who answers me with a self-conscious air! Calabre, Calabre, where are you?

Scene VII

(*The same. Calabre.*)

Calabre. Here I am, madame, here I am. Did you call me?

Bettine. Yes; answer me this. Why, a few minutes ago, did you pretend not to know anything when I asked you where your master was?

Calabre. I, madame?

Bettine. Yes, and just try to deceive me again, when you know well that he has gone to the princess's.

Calabre. My word, madame, I did not know . . .

Bettine. You did not know?

Calabre. Pardon me, I mean I did not know whether I was to inform you of it or not.

Bettine. Ah, so you were forbidden, then? Will you speak out?

Calabre. Well, madame, since you will have it so, I will hide nothing from you. The Baron

lost at cards yesterday a sum which he had promised to pay this morning. He wished before everything else to fulfill this promise.

Bettine. He has lost, my good fellow. Ah! good Heavens! I knew nothing about it. You see, Marquis, that was his secret, and that was all that he was hiding from me, and he told Calabre about it. Was it not wrong of him not to tell me anything about it?

The Marquis. It seems to me that it merely shows great delicacy of feeling on his part.

Bettine. Does it not? Oh, my Steinberg has not an ordinary soul . . . But, really, he might come back a little more quickly.

The Marquis. A woman who plays, and who wins at cards, and who has to be paid within twenty-four hours like a collector, is not, you may believe me, my dear, the woman whom one loves.

Bettine. But when I come to think of it, I am mistaken again. Tell me, Calabre, why did he not send you to deliver this money?

Calabre. The trouble was, madame, that he did not have it. He had to go to town to get it from his banker.

Bettine. But I had money. Oh, how wrong it is! how cruel it is! Was it a large sum?

Calabre. No, madame, I do not know exactly, but he told me that he would have no trouble in raising it.

The Marquis. Come, now, my charming friend, I am going to leave you, and pursue my way. I am happy to find you happy. Farewell.

Bettine. Oh, you will come back to see us, and I wish you to be our friend—a friend to both of us. I insist upon seeing you every day, as people do in our country. Where do you live?

The Marquis. Oh, just a step away, in that white house that you see behind the trees.

Bettine. How delicious it is! We shall be neighbors.

The Marquis. Would that we might. But I leave again to-morrow.

Bettine. Nonsense! So soon? It can not be possible! No, we will never allow that. And where are you going?

The Marquis. I am going to Parma; you know my people are there, and just now I am absolutely obliged . . .

Bettine. Good gracious! what a nuisance! You are obliged to go, you say? Well, then! I should have really liked much better not to have seen you at all. Yes, truly, for you are only bringing me another regret, and Heaven knows now when you will come back! You are a naughty, naughty man! But at least you will stay for dinner? I wish you to sign the marriage contract.

The Marquis. I can not, I have another en-

gagement; but I will come back and make a good-by call, and since I can not sign the contract, I am going to send you a bouquet for your wedding.

Bettine. A bouquet?

The Marquis. Yes!

Bettine. Hurrah for a bouquet!

The Marquis. Where are you going, if you please?

Bettine. I am going to go with you as far as the gateway. I am going to try to keep you just as long as possible. Heavens! but you are tiresome! What a bore you are!

Scene VIII

(*Calabre alone, then the Notary.*)

Calabre. Come, now, this is a little better. I think that this time the Baron will be obliged to recognize my intelligence. Good Heavens! there he is coming in. He is going to meet mistress with the Marquis, and after his forbidding it through me. (*He looks from the balcony.*) No, no, he is going by another path. He is going in the direction of the little grove, as if he were purposely trying to avoid meeting them. Could that be possible? Yes, it is perfectly evident. He saw them, and he is making a detour.

The Notary. Calabre, are the contracting parties ready?

Calabre. No, Signor Capsucefalo, no, not yet. In an instant, in a minute.

The Notary. Very well, sir, I am all ready.

Calabre. I beg your pardon?

The Notary. What did you say?

Calabre (*still looking out*). I thought that you were saying something.

The Notary. Yes, I was saying that I am all ready.

Calabre. Very good. You have some of the muscatel yet, have you not?

The Notary. Yes, sir, more than I need.

Calabre. Very good, sir, very good. It is quite unnecessary for you to disturb yourself. I will give you notice, when it is time.

The Notary. I shall not stir, sir, I shall not stir from here.

Scene IX

(*Calabre. Steinberg.*)

Steinberg. So this is how you carry out my orders?

Calabre. Sir, I can assure you . . .

Steinberg. What! Did I not tell you that I did not wish to see this man here?

Calabre. Sir, I gave your message, but mistress paid no attention to it.

Steinberg. That can not be possible! Did you repeat to her? . . .

Calabre. All that you told me, sir. I even invented an excuse to explain your absence, sir.

Steinberg. What excuse did you invent?

Calabre. Sir, I said that you had been playing cards.

Steinberg. What! you idiot! And what did you know about it?

Calabre. There, I have done wrong again. There was nothing else left for me to do, sir; you told me so this morning, and I was very careful to add that the sum was trifling.

Steinberg. Yes, trifling, it was trifling this morning, but now! Heavens, man, it is a Monte Carlo, it is a gambling hell, that palace.

Calabre. You have been playing again, sir. Alas! I told you so, sir!

Steinberg. You told me so, you donkey! Just say that again, just say that again, if you please! Is there, in the whole world, a more senseless, idiotic sentence than that one? As soon as any misfortune overtakes us it is on every body's lips. My horse stumbles when it is taking a ditch. I fall and break a leg. "We told you so!" cry those who pick you up. What a sweet effort on the part of friendship!

Calabre. Sir, I have already tried to make bold to tell you that if my small savings . . .

Steinberg. Morbleu! your savings! What do you want me to do with them?

Calabre. I have fifteen thousand francs of my own, sir; it seems to me . . .

Steinberg. Fifteen thousand francs! A fine sum that would be! Listen to me, but, on your life, keep to yourself all that I am going to say to you. I must go away.

Calabre. You, sir! Can it be possible?

Steinberg. There is nothing else for me to do. I have not this money that I have lost, and I must get it, and in order to get it I must go to Rome or Naples. I know some bankers there. I shall set off secretly. I shall find some pretext.

Calabre. But what about mistress, sir? It will be the death of her, sir.

Steinberg. She will suffer. Do you think, then, that I do not suffer too? It is with the chill of despair in my soul that I go away from here, but I repeat that I must go away—or end my life; so what would you have me do? Go into my room, call Pietro and Giovanni, get everything ready . . . and not an unnecessary word . . . then send to the post for horses this evening.

Calabre. Then you do not care for my fifteen thousand francs, sir?

Steinberg. Fifteen thousand! I need a hundred thousand!

Scene X

(*The same. Bettine.*)

Bettine. A hundred thousand francs, Steinberg, you need one million francs.

Steinberg. Who says so, my dear Bettine? (*He kisses her hand.*) How are you this morning? You are as fresh as a rose.

Bettine. I am not the person of interest just now, but you; tell me frankly, have you been gambling?

Steinberg. You misunderstood, my dear.

Bettine. Misunderstood? Is it true, Calabre?

Calabre. Did you speak to me, madame? I do not know.

Steinberg. Go to your work, Calabre. You have done enough talking for to-day.

Calabre (*aside, as he goes out*). Well! there is another false step. Good Heavens, but things are going from bad to worse.

Scene XI

(*Steinberg and Bettine.*)

Bettine. My dear, you are not frank with me.

Steinberg. I tell you that you misunderstand. This sum of which I was speaking was in connection with a change, a whim . . .

Bettine. Of a change?

Steinberg. Yes, change of property, a rather fine property which is for sale, going for a mere song, and which, perhaps, would meet with your approval. We shall talk about it later, if you please. I have some orders to give.

Bettine. Steinberg, you are not telling me the truth.

Steinberg. Why do you tell me that?

Bettine. Because I can see it for myself.

Steinberg. If you are not going to believe me, what shall I tell you?

Bettine. You can tell me why, when I saw you coming in the distance in the garden, you were pale, why you were talking to yourself, and why you went down the side path to avoid us.

Steinberg. I went down the side path because I did not care to meet you in the company in which I saw you.

Bettine. What! Stéfani! You did not know him. He was an old friend. What could be your motive?

Steinberg. I do not care for gossip, I can not always avoid hearing it, but I never repeat it.

Bettine. Gossip about what? About me and the good Marquis? That can not be taken seriously. But now I remember, you used to see him at my house in Florence. Is that where you heard gossip?

Steinberg. Perhaps!

Bettine. What! at Florence? But Stéfani came like every body else. Just remember I held court there, I was queen in those days, my dear. I had my flatterers, my courtiers, even my soldiers and my common people. The worthy people of the pit who loved me so, and whose affection I returned. Ungrateful fellow that you are, you, who, alone in all that throng, were dearer to me than my triumphs, and whom I summoned among them all, that I might lay my crown at your feet. You, Steinberg, jealous on account of talk. Vexed at a chance visit that I received. Come! come! it is a jest, admit it. A simple caprice, or rather now, I guess what it is—a pretext to make me forget what I wish to know—and to rid you of my questions.

Steinberg (*sitting down*). Oh, my dear Bettine, you are ravishingly charming, and I, I am very unhappy.

Bettine. Unhappy! you! and when you are near me! What is the trouble, quick, tell me what it is all about.

Steinberg. I am wrong, and I have expressed myself very badly. You know what gamesters are. Well, Bettine, it is true, I have been playing, and I have come back in a bad temper, but it is nothing, nothing worth paying any attention to. Do not let us think about it, and forgive me.

Bettine. What you are saying now is not altogether true.

Steinberg. I beg of you to believe it.

Bettine. Do you really wish it?

Steinberg. I implore you.

Bettine. Well, I shall believe it, since that is pleasing to you. Come now, calm yourself! Away with black thoughts! Smooth out this frowning brow. Do you remember this song?

(*She goes to the piano and plays the prelude of a ballad.*)

Steinberg (*rises*). Bettine, not that song.

Bettine. Why? You wrote it for me when we were going through Sorrento, after we had been out upon the water. Is it because it is associated with those memories that it has already ceased to be pleasing to you? Once it used to drive away your cares.

(*She sings.*)

Nina, thy heavenly smile,
Thy voice's sweet beguile,
Thy speaking eyes so blest
Increase my happiness.
What peaceful eyes are thine,
What journeyings divine?
The rose leaves fall apart
And die upon thy heart.

Steinberg (*with a sigh, while Bettine is playing, without singing*). Could I ever forsake her . . . and for whom . . . Good

God! by what diabolical power have I allowed myself to be subdued?

Bettine. What are you dreaming about, sir? Do you think you are being very polite? It seems to me that I am going wrong here, I do not remember very well. Do come here. . . .

Steinberg (*going nearer to the piano and singing*).

Nina, my charming one,
The tempest roars in vain
Across the foaming sea
What blessed joy I see
A laughing, tranquil shore
Beyond the breaker's roar,
A sure and sweet retreat
Of happiness complete.

Together they sing:

O lovely Italy
Foolish or wise, to thee
Our hearts will ever turn,
Our fondest memories burn.
Never can we forget
Thy sky of violet;
We know thy flowery strand
Is love's own fatherland.

Steinberg. My dear, listen to me. This song, these words that come from the heart . . . these memories thrill my very soul, and bring me to myself. No! so much love shall not be a mere dream. Such hope of happiness

shall not prove false. I swear it at your feet. I have just shown myself jealous without a cause, but I have often given you great reason to be so.

Bettine. Do not let us speak of that, at all, Steinberg.

Steinberg (*rising*). I wish to speak of it. I am weary of pretending, . . . of restraining myself, of feeling myself unworthy of you. My visits to the princess have caused you many a tear, I know. . . .

Bettine. Charles!

Steinberg. I wish never to see her again, never to hear her mentioned! Let us live with, to, and for ourselves, and let the whole universe forget us in its turn! The notary is there, is he not? Well, Bettine, let us sign the contract at this very moment. The witnesses have not come. I know very well why, and I will tell you; but you will take any neighbor woman; and I, morbleu! I will take Calabre, and when once I am your husband, come what may! I repeat the words of the old proverb: "He who loves, and is loved, is safely sheltered from the blows of fate."

Scene XII

(*The same. Calabre.*)

Calabre (*coming in with a letter and a box*). This letter has just come for the Baron.

Steinberg. The deuce! and is there any such great hurry about it?

Calabre. Yes, sir! the man who was sent said they were waiting for an answer.

Steinberg. Let us see what it is.

(*He takes the letter.*)

Calabre (*giving the box to Bettine*). This is for you, madame.

Steinberg (*after having hurriedly read the letter*). Calabre . . .

Calabre. Yes, sir!

Steinberg. Who is there?

Calabre. Sir, it is a man . . . from over there. . . .

Steinberg. From the princess? Where is this man?

Calabre. Out there in the hall, sir.

Steinberg. I am going to speak to him.

Scene XIII

(*Bettine. Calabre.*)

Bettine. What is happening next, my good fellow? Did you notice how his expression changed when he opened that letter? Is it some fresh misfortune? Ah, what trouble this woman brings upon us!

Calabre. The letter is not from her, madame; one of her people brought it, but it is not her writing. . . .

Bettine. Her writing! Alas! except me, every one in the house knows it, then?

Calabre (*pointing to the box*). That, madame, comes from the Marquis.

Bettine. Ah! I was not thinking about it. (*She opens the box.*) Diamonds!

Calabre. There is a little note.

Bettine (*she reads*). "You gave me permission, fair lady, to send you a bouquet for your wedding . . ." Good Heavens! I hear Steinberg's voice, . . . he is speaking so loudly! Do you hear him, Calabre? He is coming back here. . . . Take this jewel case, he must not see it, not now; and tell me quickly before he comes back, how much did he lose?

Calabre. Oh, madame, it is impossible for me . . .

Bettine. I must know it, and you must tell me, though you were bound by a thousand oaths. Must I go down on my knees to you?

Calabre. My dear mistress!

Bettine. Is it a hundred thousand francs?

Calabre (*in a whisper*). Well then, yes, it is!

Scene XIV

(*The same. Steinberg.*)

Steinberg (*to Calabre*). What are you doing there? You may leave the room.

(*Calabre goes out.*)

Bettine. You seemed moved, Steinberg, . . . this letter seems to have . . . vexed you.

Steinberg. Not in the least; . . . but what is that box which has just been sent to you?

Bettine. A mere trifle. Tell me, my dear, a few minutes ago . . .

Steinberg. A trifle; . . . but what was it?

Bettine. Good Heavens! there is no mystery about it, . . . it is a present from Stéfani.

Steinberg. Ah! a present? and what is the occasion?

Bettine. The occasion of . . . our marriage.

Steinberg. A wedding present! . . . Is he a relative of yours?

Bettine. No, but I told you he is an old friend.

Steinberg. And so old friends give presents to you, do they? I was not familiar with this custom. Let me see this box, if you will be so good.

Bettine. It is not here, it was taken to my room. But, my dear, will you not do me the favor of telling me what this letter . . .

Steinberg. Do you wish me to call your maid?

Bettine. Why?

Steinberg. To see this present. You know that I am a connoisseur.

Bettine. I was mistaken . . . the box is not in my room; Calabre, I think, kept it.

Steinberg. Ah! . . . if it were an article of value, then your precaution was very wise. (*Calling.*) Calabre! I say, there, Calabre! where are you?

Scene XV

(*The same. Calabre.*)

Calabre. Sir!

Steinberg. Where do you keep yourself when I call you?

Calabre. Sir, I was in your room. You doubtless remember the orders . . .

Steinberg. That is not what we are talking about just now.

Bettine. Calabre, have you the box which I just entrusted to you?

Calabre. Yes, madame.

Bettine. Give it to me.

(*She hands it to Steinberg.*)

Steinberg (*opening the case*). These are very fine diamonds. My word! a bouquet of flowers in brilliants, with rubies and emeralds; that is altogether gallant! And there is a line with it.

Bettine. You may read it.

Steinberg. Heaven forbid! My curiosity does not go to such lengths.

Bettine. But do, I beg you. I have not read it yet.

Steinberg. Really? Since you wish it then. . . . (*He reads.*) "You gave me permission, fair lady, to send you a bouquet for your wedding. If I were to stay for a long time in this part of the country, I should send you flowers, which, when they were faded, might easily be replaced, but since my unlucky star forbids me to live near you, permit me to offer you, I humbly pray, a few less fragile blossoms. May this reminder of an old friendship sometimes recall memories which I, for my part, shall never forget. I shall have the pleasure of seeing you this evening." This is excellent! Calabre, did you send for the horses?

(*He lays the box upon the table.*)

Calabre. Not yet, sir; I thought . . .

Steinberg. Really? How many times must I speak, to make myself understood. Let Pietro go at once.

Bettine. Horses, Steinberg! what are you going to do with them?

Steinberg. I must go to town. Hurry up, Calabre.

Bettine. Just a moment! Would it not be possible? . . .

Steinberg. Who is to be obeyed here?

(*Calabre bows and starts to go out.*)

Bettine. Charles, I know your secret. I did not wish to say anything to you about it. I would have waited, and I could have wished that this confidence had come to me from you. But you wish to go away. . . . Why?

Steinberg. You know all, you say, and yet you ask me this question! It seems to me that there is a sort of inquisition in order here, and that people show a remarkable interest in my affairs; but it seems to me, too, that Calabre shows greater discretion in keeping what you entrust to him than in respecting my orders.

Calabre. Sir, I swear to you on my soul . . .

Steinberg. I am not questioning you. And I too, I wished to maintain silence, but since you have wished to know all, well, madame, you shall

be satisfied. Yes, I have acted very foolishly. My honor is at stake; my fortune, which was already compromised, is to-day lost. This letter comes from a creditor who announces to me, suddenly, a journey which occasions immediate departure . . . a pretext to ask me for money: as it was a pretext for your Marquis to give some to you.

Bettine. Merciful Heavens! are you losing your mind?

Steinberg. Not at all. But do you believe, if you please, that I do not know by heart these finesses, these little artifices, these stage ruses? Suppose that a person went away just to get himself held back, add to it a substantial gift, so that one may feel all that is being lost! There is something very new, very remarkable! But in order not to see clearly through it one must never have set foot in the foyer of a theater, never have known women like you!

Bettine. Women like me, Steinberg! You are trying to anger me. But you will not succeed, I warn you, for it is not you who are speaking. If your misfortunes are making you unjust, the simplest way is to destroy the cause. Listen to me: I have not, of course, a hundred thousand francs in my dressing table drawer, but Filippo Valle, our banker, has it for me. All that we have to do is to send to town for it, and we shall have the amount within an hour.

Steinberg. I do not wish it.

Bettine. Let us sign our contract; from that moment you will be my husband.

Steinberg. Never.

Bettine. You wished it a few minutes ago.

Steinberg. Never. Never at such a price.

Bettine. At such a price! . . . Ah! You no longer love me.

Steinberg. It is not a question of love in a business matter. And what would happen if I gave way? You would be ridiculous, and I should be contemptible.

Bettine. The ridiculousness would make me laugh, and the contempt would arouse my pity.

Steinberg. Would you laugh, too, if ruin stared you in the face?

Bettine. I do not fear it. If poverty is not unbearable to you, there is nothing in it at which I shrink. If it frightens you, well, I am not dead, and what I used to do can be begun over again.

Steinberg. You mean go back to the stage, do you not? That is your secret desire; all the stronger because you know that I would never consent to it.

Bettine. My dear . . .

Steinberg. Let us drop the subject there, I beg you. . . . I shall add only one word; I was ready to marry you when I thought that I should be able to assure you a free and

honorable existence. That I am unable now to do.

Bettine. But why this? what is your motive?

Steinberg. What is my motive? What about my name? My family? my friends? and the world? . . .

Bettine. Ah, there is the obstacle.

Steinberg. Yes, there it is, and please understand it. Yes, the world does separate us, the world, which none of us can do without, which is my element, my life, from which I expect nothing, from which I have everything to fear, and which I love more than anything else. The world, the pitiless world, which lets us go on, looks at us with a smile, would not warn us of the danger, but which, the day after a mistake, closes before us as irrevocably as the tomb.

Bettine. I did not think that the world was so heartless.

Steinberg. It is not so at all. It is quite right in what it does. What it pardons is incredible; and how it sustains you, how it defends you, out of respect for itself as soon as you belong to it; as long as you conform to its laws, which are the most gentle, the most easy to obey, and the most indulgent that can be imagined; but woe to him who transgresses them! Woe to him who oversteps this impunity, who takes advantage of this indulgence! He is lost, he has nothing to save him, and this affable cruelty, this

stern patience, which strikes only when obliged, is simply justice.

Bettine. So you are going away?

Steinberg. And what else would you have? With what air could I play this rôle of the husband who lives upon a fortune which is not his, travel up and down Italy with a woman whom I merely followed, with my name upon her passport and my coat-of-arms upon her carriage. Moreover, if the impossible did take place, and one could consent to such an arrangement, it would be necessary that this woman should be worthy of such a sacrifice.

Bettine. Then is that the real motive, Steinberg?

Steinberg. I seem to have great difficulty in making myself understood. (*Pointing to the jewel case.*) Well! my motive, there it is.

(*He goes out.*)

Scene XVI

(*Bettine and Calabre.*)

Bettine. Calabre.

Calabre. Madame.

Bettine. I am lost.

Calabre. Patience, madame. You must not think . . .

Bettine. I am lost forever, forever lost.

Calabre. No, madame, I repeat it, you must not think that the Baron has said his last word, nor even that he meant what he said. No, it is impossible. He will change his tone when his vexation has been somewhat allayed, for it can not be against you that he is irritated. He will come back, madame, he will come back.

Bettine (*looking out from the balcony*). There he is going away.

Calabre. Can it be possible?

Bettine. Do you not see him? He is going away alone, on foot! Where is he going? To town likely. Run after him, Calabre, and stop him. Ah! my heart fails me.

Calabre. I am going, madame, I obey your orders, . . . but at least allow . . .

Bettine. No, stop! Let him go away; but you must go too, you must reach the town before him. Do you feel able to take the cross-road over the mountain.

(*She goes to the table and writes.*)

Calabre. For you, madame, I would climb Mount Vesuvius.

Bettine. No one but you can do my message. Filippo Valle knows you. And you, do you know the person to whom Steinberg owes this sum which he has lost?

Calabre. The man who brought the letter told me that it was Count Alfani.

Bettine. Here is a line for Valle. He must

have money of mine to the amount which is necessary. He must send it an once to this Alfani, and he must say that it is the princess who is lending this money to Steinberg.

Calabre. What, madame, you wish . . .

Bettine. Yes, he no longer loves me enough to accept a favor from me, but believing that it comes from her, he will not dare to refuse. Come, Calabre, hurry up, we have no time to lose.

Calabre. But, madame, consider that this is a large sum, and that you said this very morning, to the notary, that your fortune was far from being large.

Bettine. Never mind, never mind. Do not disturb yourself about it.

A Servant (coming in). The Marquis Stéfani asks to be received.

Bettine. Stéfani! (*After a silence.*) Yes, certainly let him come in. Come, Calabre, how is this? you are not off yet?

Calabre. Alas! madame . . .

Bettine. Do not disturb yourself, I say. I heard you, a little while ago, it seems to me, offer fifteen thousand francs to your master.

Calabre. Yes, madame, and if it were possible . . .

Bettine. Do you possess much besides that?

Calabre. I am not saying; but in a similar case . . .

Bettine. And you do not wish me to do what you wish to do? Go, Calabre, go my trusty friend, and when I am ruined you will offer me your services and I will accept them.

Calabre. I shall ride master's old hunter, he is stout of limb yet, and I, too, in spite of whatever one may say; I will be off and back again in a moment. Ah, if Monsieur de Steinberg has a heart, in a quarter of an hour he will be back at your feet.

Bettine. Go, do not make me think of it.

Scene XVII

(*Bettine and the Marquis, coming in at the right, while Calabre goes out at the left.*)

Bettine (*aside*). And yet that is exactly what I hope.

The Marquis. That was a noble deed, my dear, and in every way worthy of you, but it has its danger.

Bettine. It is you, Stéfani! To what do you refer?

The Marquis. To what you have just done.

Bettine. Were you there? Can you have listened to me?

The Marquis. No, Heaven forbid; but I heard.

Bettine. Marquis!

The Marquis. Do not be angry, I beg you, do not defend yourself either. I was simply coming to see you, as I said I should, to say good-by to you; there was no one in the reception hall, no one in the picture gallery, I was waiting in front of your pictures, until one of your servants should come by, when your voice reached me. I did not exactly catch everything, but I understood fairly well. You are paying a little debt, and you do not wish it to be known. You are even hiding under the name of another—that is exactly like you, Elizabeth. Can you feel hurt that once more I receive a proof of all the delicate feeling and generosity of your nature?

Bettine. But, . . . have you been here long?

The Marquis. No; not more than two minutes, and I tell you I understand but very vaguely. As I was setting foot on the stairway, I noticed your M. de Steinberg, who was going away through the garden. He did not return my bow, can I have offended him?

Bettine. Are you jesting? He scarcely knows you!

The Marquis. You might even say that he does not know me at all.

Bettine. He simply can not have seen you. He is very absent-minded just now.

The Marquis. Yes, . . . I understand

perfectly, . . . the money he lost, is it not? That young man is playing too high.

Bettine. Yes.

The Marquis. Yes, and he does not know how to play. (*Bettine sits down pensively.*) You must not think that cards, stupid as they may seem, are merely a game of chance. There is a way of losing one's money. The indifferent person who is looking on does not see anything in it; but ask the man who is holding the cards what they represent to him. These little bits of colored cardboard are not for him merely black or red. They mean for him good fortune or bad fortune. Fortune, as soon as it is called upon, it little matters by what means, hastens up and flutters around the table, sometimes smiling and sometimes stern, and one must study to please it. Not painted cardboard nor dice, but its caprices, its whims, that is what we must foresee, what we must divine, what we must catch on the wing. There is more science in a dice-box than d'Alembert ever dreamed of.

Bettine. You talk like a regular gamester, Marquis. Have you been one?

The Marquis. Yes, and a rather fortunate gamester, because I was very bold when I was winning, and, as soon as fortune turned its back upon me, I was bored.

Bettine. They say that people never get over the passion for gaming.

The Marquis. Certainly! It is like others, but here I am babbling on, . . . all I wished to do was to kiss your hand; and then I shall withdraw, for I should be in the way . . .

Bettine. No, stay; stay, Stéfani, I beg you. Since you almost know my secrets, we shall say nothing about them, shall we, and you will forgive me if I seem absent-minded? Sorrow is never very attractive.

The Marquis. Yours is better than that, it is estimable and it does you honor. I know people who do kindnesses, like the bear in the fable, with his paving stone. They have to be besought, they barter with you, and when they think that you are sufficiently filled with eternal gratitude, they overwhelm you with some terrible kindness, and so they destroy that which is best of all, the good grace of a good action. But that is not your way, my dear, and your hand is even lighter when it obeys your heart than when it hovers over the keys of the piano to express your thought.

Bettine. Do sit down, I beg you.

The Marquis (seating himself). Gladly, provided you promise me that one minute before I become *de trop,* you will be a true enough friend to turn me out.

Bettine. A friend, Marquis? By the way, do you know that you sent me a bouquet so

superb that I would certainly accept it from no one in the world but you.

The Marquis. No pearl or diamond could be worth such a word from your lips. There is something which is worrying you. Let me ask you a single question. In these matters, do you not take any precautions?

Bettine. What precautions?

The Marquis. But, Heaven's name! a signature, a mortgage, a guarantee . . .

Bettine. I do not understand anything at all about those matters.

The Marquis. You are wrong, morbleu, you are wrong.

Bettine. Then that is what you meant by saying, when you came in, that there was a danger for me?

The Marquis. Exactly.

Bettine. Do explain what you mean.

The Marquis. The trouble is that it is an exceedingly delicate matter, and then I should add to your anxiety.

Bettine. The best way of adding to it is to say only half what you mean.

The Marquis. You are right and I wrong. Let us say no more about it. Consider that I have said nothing about it.

(*He rises.*)

Bettine. Not at all, for I understand your fears. You know the princess?

The Marquis. Oh, yes, oh, yes, I know her.

Bettine. Do you think her capable of doing a wrong deed?

The Marquis. I can not tell anything about it.

Bettine. But I mean of a perfidy, a base action?

The Marquis. Ah, who can tell?

Bettine. Stéfani, you frighten me. Listen to me. This morning, you saw me almost jealous of that woman.

The Marquis. I should say that you were altogether so.

Bettine. Yes, at times; but you know how it is, my friend: we imagine that we doubt friends whom we love, we overwhelm them with reproaches, we call them faithless, false, and, in the bottom of our hearts, we do not believe a word that we say; and while our lips accuse, our hearts absolve. That is true, is it not?

The Marquis. Without a doubt. Well! my dear Bettine. . . .

Bettine. Well, Marquis, frankly, I never supposed it possible that he loved that woman. And now the horrible thought comes to me. You have seen him with her, what do you think of it?

The Marquis. In Heaven's name, my dear, what are you asking me? We can not see hearts,

as Molière said. Frankly, moreover, I have no faith in it.

Bettine. Then what was the meaning of this danger of which you were speaking to me.

The Marquis. Ah, there are princesses and princesses.

Bettine. And you think that this one . . .?

The Marquis. She gave me slightly the effect of not being of the very best brand, but of having been picked up at some chance sale or other.

Bettine. If that is how it is . . .

The Marquis. I am not sure, but I admit that it is very distressing for me to see the fate of a person like you in the hands of a woman like her.

Bettine. I could not believe that Steinberg . . .

The Marquis. Could deceive you. I am of your opinion. Well! if he does not adore you, I pity him with all my heart, but here is some one coming; it is he. I shall withdraw. No! it is not he; it is his valet.

Scene XVIII

(*The same. Calabre.*)

Bettine. Well, Calabre, what have you done?

Calabre. All that you told me, madame.

Bettine. The money has been paid?

Calabre. Yes, madame.

Bettine. Have you seen Steinberg?

Calabre. Alas! yes.

Bettine. What did he say to you?

Calabre. Here is a letter.

Bettine (*after having read it quickly*). Ah, this is good . . . this is perfect . . . this is just as it should be.

(*She drops fainting into an armchair.*)

Calabre. Madame! madame! . . .

The Marquis. What is it?

Calabre. Look after her, sir, while I go and get what is needed.

The Marquis (*drawing out a flask*). This flask will be enough. What have you come to tell her?

Calabre. Ah! sir, it is too horrible to tell; he has gone off with the princess.

The Marquis. Gone off! There she is opening her eyes. We must take away this letter.

(*He starts to take the letter which Bettine is holding in her hand.*)

Bettine. No, no, do not take that from me. Where am I? I have been dreaming. Oh! it is you, Marquis; I beg your pardon.

The Marquis. You must keep quiet. Do not get up.

Bettine. Ah, wretched woman that I am! I remember now! He has gone away. It is true; is it not, Calabre? Do you know that, Stéfani?

He has gone away with that woman! Here, read this letter, read it aloud.

The Marquis. I know all, my dear.

Bettine. Ah, really? is the news already known? Am I already the talk of the town? Without doubt, this adventure has its amusing side. It will furnish material for public gaiety. But how could they dare to laugh at me, before they know what I am going to do? All is not finished, and, apparently, I too have the right to say my little word in this comedy.

The Marquis. No one will laugh at you, and there is nothing less amusing than stealing money from one's neighbor.

Bettine (*becoming more excited*). Steal! who mentions such a thing? This sum which I disposed of, I gave voluntarily, I begged that it be accepted. I was obliged to resort to a ruse to overcome an obstinate refusal. It is true that my stratagem did not turn to my own advantage. But who can say that I repent it? If that is why you pity me, you must think my grief very singular.

(*She rises.*)

The Marquis. I do not know what the sum was, but it seems that it was not trifling.

Bettine. Well! what does it matter to me? What a strange idea you have of the very persons whom you pretend to esteem, if you think that my interest in this whole affair is merely

financial. Ah! if Steinberg were to come back to me, would the rest count for anything? But so it is that the world judges. Deceived love, what is that? a woman who is abandoned, an oath which is broken, a sacred tie which is sundered, these are mere trifles. Such a thing is to be seen any day, it is talked about, it is an amusing subject of conversation; but, as soon as it is a question of a little money loss, of a few miserable handfuls of chips, which one may have chanced to lose, then every one will pity you, and your pecuniary suffering will be the object of a sordid pity, which makes you blush to the very roots of your hair.

The Marquis. Your grief, Bettine, makes you rather misdirect your reproaches.

Bettine. Yes, my friend, you are right. I know the man you are, and I am wounding you. But what I suffer is so terrible that you must forgive what I say, for I do not know what I am saying, and I feel as if I were plunged to the bottom of an abyss. Here, Stéfani, read me that, read it aloud, I beg you.

The Marquis (*reading*). "My dear Bettine: Although you have acted without my consent, I am obliged to thank you for what you have just done for me. . . ."

Bettine. Obliged to thank me!

The Marquis (*continuing*). "But you understand that my first care must be to find means

of repaying you the sum which you have been so good as to advance me. . . ."

Bettine. He could not write a better business letter.

The Marquis (*continuing*). "As it is impossible to carry out our plan, propriety seems to forbid my staying longer with you."

Bettine. What do you say to that, Marquis?

The Marquis (*continuing*). "So I am going to leave this country. A lady, who is a friend of ours . . ."

Bettine. What audacity!

The Marquis (*continuing*). "A friend of ours, is leaving now for Rome, and asks me to accompany her. I know, moreover, that I do not leave you alone, . . ."

Bettine. Continue, continue.

The Marquis (*goes on*). "And whether I return or not, you may count, my dear Bettine, upon hearing from me shortly. Steinberg."

Bettine. Steinberg! . . . Let the world utter your name when it names an ingrate.

The Marquis. It is certain, that all this is not very fine; indeed, it might call for vengeance.

Bettine. Vengeance! Ah, yes, no doubt. But what vengeance can I find? You speak as a man, Stéfani, and as a man you resent an affront. You, yourself, however, what can you do when you have an enemy? . . . What can you do more than kill him? . . . You

think that in so doing you avenge yourself? Ah, my friend, for an honest heart there are worse things than death, but for a coward the worst thing there is, is death, which is nothing.

The Marquis. I would wager that this insolent letter is not the unaided work of your Baron, there is a woman's hand in it; it is a two-headed monster. For, after all, what need was there to tell you that he did not go away alone. The cowardice is his, and the insult, the woman's.

Bettine. I felt it as you do, and he understands it too, and he tried to raise an insurmountable barrier between us. He was afraid that I would follow him, he feared my pardon, and he took this means of avoiding it; he knew that when one woman strikes at the heart of another, she renders any kind of return impossible, and the wound can not be healed. Oh, faithless man! the very day which had been fixed upon, which he had chosen for our marriage! Yesterday evening you should have seen how well he dissimulated. He seemed, in his impatience, to suffer at waiting till daybreak. Oh, Heavens! and it was I whom he was thus deceiving! My trusting soul was so treated! You know me, Marquis, do you not? Well, I have struggled with my hasty temper, I bowed my pride in order to bear what often hurt me, but which I believed was done, at least, without falseness, without any intention of hurting. Now I see

you such as you are, traitor! and you rend my heart and my honor.

The Marquis. Ah, by the way, a word in the letter occurs to me. When he said that he was not leaving you alone, what did he mean by it? Is Calabre to stay with you?

Calabre. Oh, no, sir! that means something else.

Bettine. Be still, Calabre.

The Marquis. Why, then? Am I overstepping bounds?

(*Bettine does not answer. Calabre signals to the Marquis, and points to the jewel case which is on the table.*)

The Marquis. I do not understand. What do you mean next?

Calabre. Mistress forbids me to speak.

Bettine. Speak if you wish.

The Marquis (*getting up and going to the table*). This really arouses my curiosity; what does it mean, Calabre?

Calabre. Well, sir, since I am allowed to say it, this jewel box is partly the cause of all that has happened.

The Marquis. Doubtless, you are trying to jest.

Calabre. Not at all. The Baron reproached mistress horribly for having accepted these jewels.

The Marquis. But that is perfect nonsense!

Calabre. And this morning, sir, if I am to tell you everything, I was charged myself to tell mistress that she was not to receive you.

The Marquis. My word of honor, this sounds like a dream. . . . Can all this that I am being told be true, Bettine?

Bettine. Very true.

The Marquis. But it seems like some mystification. What was the reason of this German's quarrel? It could only be some malicious pretext which he needed as an excuse for his anger.

Calabre. Yes, sir, nothing else.

The Marquis. I understand, but what a strange idea!

Calabre. You see, sir, you often came to call upon mistress when she used to be in Florence, and the Baron imagined . . .

The Marquis. What rubbish!

Calabre. He was convinced, when he saw you come here, that you were going to pay court once again to mistress.

The Marquis. Well?

Calabre. And that made him angry.

The Marquis. It is very unfortunate; but just think he was going to marry her, and that was all the consideration that he had for her. He is an astonishing gentleman.

Bettine. Stéfani, consider that I loved him.

The Marquis. True, I beg your pardon. I have not the same reasons as you for sparing him. So then, Calabre, you say that I was an object of jealousy?

Bettine. Yes.

The Marquis. Really? Well! This pleases me, it makes me young again. Ah, so I was an object of jealousy! (*After a short silence.*) Morbleu! he is right. Bettine, listen to me. You have loved, and you have been deceived, you chose ill, and you are paying the penalty, it is vexatious, but it happens to the best of people. The best, indeed, are those who least often escape. If, now, you feel any rancor, and the slightest inclination to hasten after the past, I am ready, and I will gladly help you to take the revenge which is due you. If I am no longer nimble-footed enough to whirl about in a waltz, I am strong enough, thank Heaven, to meet a sword-cut, and I shall be delighted to pay back to this gentleman what I once received for you.

Bettine. My friend . . .

The Marquis. If, on the contrary, which to my mind is infinitely preferable, you could have the patience, I shall even say the good sense to leave things to that physician who cures everything, Time, known since the beginning of the world, I offer myself to you.

Bettine. You, Stéfani!

The Marquis. I; not to-day, nor to-morrow,

nor in a month, nor in six months, but when you wish it, when it pleases you; if it ever can please you, when you shall have become calm, cured, quite your old self again; that is to say, merry, sweet, and charming; when the wound which a thankless wretch inflicted upon you shall have effaced itself with the forgetful days, then, I repeat, I offer myself to you. They say that I wish to pay court to you, it is quite true; that I loved you, it is true; that I love you still, it is true; and what I say to you now, I ought to have said to you three years ago, and I shall say it to you all my life.

Bettine. Since you speak to me so frankly, I shall not be less open with you. To make at once any answer to what you propose to me, is, you understand, quite impossible.

The Marquis. Whenever you wish.

Bettine. But what I can, and will say to you, at once, and without hesitation is, that in the midst of the sorrow which I feel, and all this horror which overwhelms me, at this moment when my heart is broken by so cruel a neglect and so base treachery, your words awaken within me a sweet emotion, and why should I hide it from you? Yes, Stéfani, I am happy to see that this world is not yet a desert, and that if falsehood and perfidy are sometimes to be found in it, at least we can find on the way the faithful hand of a friend. I knew it, but I was about

to forget it. You have brought it back to my mind, . . . for that, I thank you.

The Marquis. And you could, for a moment, doubt that you were loved?

Bettine. No; I believe what you say to me, but there is one thing which you have not thought of. Do you really know to whom you are speaking?

The Marquis. To the most charming woman that I know.

Bettine. Consider this, Marquis; I am absolutely in despair. The blow which has just fallen upon me was so unforeseen, so inconceivable, that it stunned me at first; and now that my reason is returning, little by little, I am trying to think how I can continue to live, and, of a truth, I do not see how.

The Marquis. You must be brave.

Bettine. No, I do not see how. By examining coolly and reasonably what has befallen me, I see no remedy, no hope; I am losing the man whom I love, and what is still more frightful, I am forced to scorn him. What can become of me? Are you of my opinion, Calabre? The more I think, the more I see that life is no longer possible for me. All that I can do now is to pray and to weep. Is it to this wreck of myself, to this phantom of your friend, that you wish to offer your hand? Is it to this mask covered with tears?

(*She weeps.*)

The Marquis. Yes, my word! and I shall never ask you to wipe away those tears. I respect your grief too greatly to try to dispel it. But, I say to you, that time will remedy matters, and let me finish what I have to say, even though, at the present moment, it may somewhat shock you. You say that there is no longer any existence possible for you. But there *is* one, all ready for you, the only one that fits you, the one which you love, the one which you have chosen, which is our pleasure and your glory. . . . You will return to the stage.

Bettine. Can you think of it?

The Marquis. Why not? Does it seem to you so strange that, when I offer to become your husband, I speak to you at the same time of returning to the stage? Yes, I remember that this morning you were telling me that, when you were once married, you counted upon giving it up forever, but I answered, it seemed to me, that such was neither my counsel, nor to my taste, I assure you. Is it possible to resist one's talent? Has one the strength, the right, especially when this fortunate talent has borne one aloft to this fair mountain where the Muses flutter about Apollo and the honey-bees about the Muses? . . . Do you think it is possible to be simply Baroness, or Marchioness, upon returning from that country? Ah, no, never!

Nature speaks; without choice, we must listen to her, for a poet writes verses and a musician songs, just as an apple-tree bears apples. When I am told that Rossini has become silent I declare that I do not believe a word of it. And neither will you, Bettine, neither will you become silent. You will find again strength and courage; once more you will take "Desdemona's" harp, and I my place in the little corner, which has become so dear to me. You will see once more the throng touched, attentive, hanging upon your slightest movement, breathing with you; the pit which loves you so, the old dilettante who rap their canes, the young dandies who have come to the theater on the way to some ball, and applaud you until they split their gloves; the fair ladies in their gilded boxes, who, when their hearts are roused by the voice of genius, so nobly shower down their perfumed bouquets! All this is waiting for you, regrets you, and calls for you. . . . Ah! how I used to enjoy your triumphs! Your friendship gave me a share in them. What would it be if you really belonged to me?

Bettine. Ah, Stéfani! . . . But it is impossible.

The Marquis. Do not say so too quickly, do not make haste. That is all that I ask of you.

(*He kisses her hand.*)

The Notary (*coming out of the summer-house*). Calabre . . .!

Calabre. Ah, is it you?

The Notary. Yes, the muscatel is finished, and I do not see the contracting parties yet. I am going back to town.

Calabre (*pointing to Bettine, who has left her hand in that of the Marquis*). Wait, just wait a little.

(*End of Bettine.*)

She allows the King to kiss her brow

VOL. V. PAGE 233

CARMOSINE

CHARACTERS

Pedro of Arragon, *King of Sicily.*
Master Bernard, *a Physician.*
Minuccio, *Troubadour.*
Perillo, *Young Lawyer.*
Ser Vespasiano, *an Adventurer.*
An Officer of the Palace.
Michel, *Servant of Bernard.*
Queen Constance, *Wife of King Pedro.*
Dame Pâque, *Wife of Bernard.*
Carmosine, *their Daughter.*
Pages, Squires, Maids-of-Honor, Queen's Attendants.
The Scene is Laid in Palermo.

ACT THE FIRST

Scene I

(*A room in Master Bernard's house. Master Bernard. Dame Pâque.*)

Dame Pâque. Will you please have the goodness to leave your drugs alone for a little while and listen to what I have to say to you?

Master Bernard. Kindly spare me by not saying it to me at all. 'Twill be more quickly done.

Dame Pâque. Just as you please. Mix away at your compound of wretched herbs to your heart's content. The only result of your ob-

stinacy will be that you will see her die in our arms.

Master Bernard. If my remedies are of no avail, of what use is your babbling? Your only pastime is to overwhelm us with your useless talk. Thank Heaven patience is a virtue.

Dame Pâque. If you really loved your poor daughter she would soon be cured.

Master Bernard. Why do you say that? Are you mad? Do you not see what I am doing from morning to night? Poor, dear heart! all that I love! Tell me, is it not enough to see this child of my affection suffering without having to bear your incessant reproaches, for any one hearing you talk would naturally suppose that I am the cause of it all. How understand this malady which is killing her? Cursed be the queen's fêtes, and may tournaments go to the devil.

Dame Pâque. You are always harping on the same string.

Master Bernard. Yes, I can not get it out of my mind that she fell ill one Sunday just as she was coming back from the jousts. I see her still, as she sat down in this chair, how pale she was, and pensive. How sadly she looked at her little feet covered with dust. She did not say a word the whole day long, and she did not appear at supper.

Dame Pâque. Come, come, you are only an

old dreamer. The best remedy of all, I tell you, in spite of your gray hairs, is a fine lad and a gold ring.

Master Bernard. If that were true, why should she refuse every match that is proposed to her? Why will she not even hear Perillo's name mentioned? And he was a friend of her childhood.

Dame Pâque. Really, a great deal she cares about him! Leave things to me. I will see that one is proposed to her whom she will not refuse.

Master Bernard. I know to whom you refer, and let me tell you *I* am the one who refuses him. You are simply infatuated with a great ne'er-do-well.

Dame Pâque. You will see for yourself what there is in it.

Master Bernard. What there is in it? But, Dame Pâque, there are certain things in this world which must be considered. I am not a great lord, madame, but I am an honest physician, with considerable fortune, Dame Pâque, yes, a very large fortune for this town. I have in my coffers a quantity of bags which are securely and properly sealed, and I shall no more give my daughter for nothing than I should think of selling her, you understand.

Dame Pâque. Really, you will do well, and your daughter will die of your wisdom if she does not die of your potions. Do put away that

flask, and I beg you pour no more poison into the poor child. Can you not see that for the last two months your drugging has done no good? Your daughter is love-sick; that is what I know about it, and I know it on good authority. She loves Ser Vespasiano, and all the vials in the world will not change matters a whit.

Master Bernard. My daughter is not a fool, and Ser Vespasiano is one. What could a donkey do with a rose?

Dame Pâque. Well, it is not you who are going to marry him. Do try to have a little common sense. Do you not admit that as she was coming back from the queen's fêtes that your daughter fell ill? Does she not talk incessantly about it? Does she not always bring round the conversation to this subject, to the skill of the knights, to the prowess of this one, the gallant bearing of that one? Can anything be more natural than that a young girl without experience should suddenly feel her heart beat for the first time at the sight of so many glittering arms, so many horses and banners, at the sound of trumpets, the clash of swords? Ah! when I was her age . . .

Master Bernard. When you were her age, Dame Pâque, it seems to me that you were married to me and trumpets did not enter into the question.

Dame Pâque. I know it, my daughter is my

flesh and blood. Now, I ask you, who at those fêtes could have interested her? Whom would she look for in the crowd if not those whom she knows? And what other, among our friends, what other than the handsome, gallant, invincible Ser Vespasiano?

Master Bernard. So invincible that at the first lance thrust he fell head over heels.

Dame Pâque. It is possible that his horse stumbled, that his lance glanced aside, I do not deny it. It may be that he fell.

Master Bernard. Assuredly it is possible; and he pirouetted in the air like a shuttlecock, and he fell, I assure you, as much as it is possible to fall.

Dame Pâque. Yes, but with what an air did he get up again!

Master Bernard. Yes, with the air of a man who finds his dinner rather heavy, and who is exceedingly desirous of staying on the ground. If such a sight made my daughter ill, you may rest assured that it is not love that ails her. Come, now, let me take this to her.

Dame Pâque. Do what you wish. I warn you that I have invited this knight to supper; whether your daughter is hungry or not, she will come; and you can judge for yourself what is going on in her heart.

Master Bernard. Why would she not speak out, if you are right? Am I, then, some tyrant,

if you please? Is it possible that one tear falls from her eyes without my heart feeling sorrow? Good Heaven! rather than see her thus fade away without saying a word, I would consent to . . . Come! Come! you will drive me out of my mind.

(*They go out on different sides.*)

Scene II

Perillo (*alone, coming in*). No one here! It seems to me that I heard voices in this room. The keys are in the doors, the house is deserted. Whence comes all this? As I was crossing the courtyard a presentiment came over me. . . . Nothing looks so much like sorrow as solitude . . . now I scarcely dare take another step forward. . . . Alas! I come back from so far, alone and almost at a venture. I had written, but I see that I was not expected. How many years is it since I left these parts? Six years! Will she know me again? Good heavens! how my heart is beating! In this house of our childhood some memory arises to check me at every step. This room, this furniture, the very walls—all are so well known, all are so dear to me! How is it that I feel at the sight of them a charm full of uneasiness which delights me, which makes me tremble? There is the door of the garden, and this one! . . . I have

traveled a long road to come to rap at it; and now I hesitate on the threshold. Alas! there is my destiny. There is the aim of all my life, the reward of my labor, my supreme hope! How will she receive me? What will she say? Am I forgotten, or am I in her thoughts? Ah! that is why I shudder, . . . all is contained in those two words, love or forgetfulness. Ah, well! what of it? She is there, without a doubt. I shall see her, she will hold out her hand to me. . . . Is she not my betrothed? Have I not the promise of her father? Is it not with that promise that I went away? Have I not faithfully kept all mine? Would it be possible? . . . No, my doubts are unjust; she can not be unfaithful to the past. Honor is imprinted upon her noble heart, as beauty upon her face, pure as the clear light of heaven. Who knows? She may be awaiting me, and presently . . . O Carmosine!

Scene III

(*Perillo. Master Bernard.*)

Master Bernard. Hush! she is sleeping. A few hours of good sleep and she is saved.

Perillo. Who, sir?

Master Bernard. Yes, saved, I think so, at least.

Perillo. Who, sir?

Master Bernard. It is you, Perillo? My poor daughter is very ill.

Perillo. Carmosine! What is her malady?

Master Bernard. I can not tell. Well, my lad, you have come back from Padua. I received your letter the other day. You have finished your studies, passed your examinations, you are doctor of laws, and you are going to receive and wear with dignity a ——— You have kept your promise, my friend. You went away a good student, and you have come back learned as a master. Ah! there is a fine career open to you. My poor daughter is very ill.

Perillo. In Heaven's name, what is the matter?

Master Bernard. Ah, I tell you I do not know. It is a joy for me to see you once more, my good Antonio, but a sad joy; for why do you come here? It was agreed between your father and me that you should marry my daughter as soon as you had an established position. You have worked hard, your heart has not changed, I am sure, neither has mine, and now, O my God! what has she done?

Perillo. Your words make me shudder. What! is her life in danger?

Master Bernard. Do you wish to drive me to desperation by making me repeat a hundred times that I do not know? She is ill, Perillo, very ill.

Perillo. Can it be possible that a man as clever and skilful, as experienced as you . . .

Master Bernard. Yes, experienced, clever! That is just what they all say. You would think that I had a panacea in my shop, and that Death would not dare to enter the shop of a physician! I did not trust to myself alone. I called to my assistance all the doctors, erudites, quacks, even, that I could find anywhere, and we consulted together ten times. The skill of dreamers, the experience of routine! Nature, Perillo, which undermines and destroys, is, when she wishes to hide herself, impenetrable. Let people show us a wound, a visible hurt, a burning fever, and we are all very learned. You have seen exactly the same thing a hundred times, and experience suggests the remedy; but when the cause of all the ill does not show itself, when the hand, the eyes, the heart-beat, the whole human covering is vainly questioned, when a young girl of eighteen years, fair as the sun, fresh as a flower, suddenly grows pale and totters; then when she is asked where she suffers, answers merely: "I am dying." . . . Antonio, how many times have I sought with an eager eye the secret of her suffering in her suffering itself . . . nothing answered me . . . not a sign, not a single clear and visible indication . . . nothing before me but silent suffering; for the poor child never complains,

and I, heart-broken, overwhelmed by my own uselessness, I look at the dusty shelves, where for long years have been piled up the miserable products of science. Perhaps, I say to myself, I have there some remedy that would save her; a drop of cordial, some healing herb; but which one? How can I divine it?

Perillo (*aside*). My presentiment was well-founded . . . this is what I have come to find. (*Aloud.*) What you tell me, sir, is horrible. . . . Shall I be allowed to see Carmosine?

Master Bernard. Certainly, when she awakes, but she is very feeble, Perillo; perhaps we should first of all prepare her for your coming, for the slightest emotion fatigues her greatly, and sometimes is sufficient to make her faint away. She loved you, she loves you still, you were to marry her. . . . You understand me?

Perillo. I shall do as you see best. Do you wish me to go away for some days, for as long a time as you judge necessary? Speak, my good father, and I will obey you.

Master Bernard. No, my lad, you will stay. For are you not one of the family?

Perillo. It is very true that I hoped to be, and to call you always by the name of father, which you sometimes allowed me to use.

Master Bernard. Always; and you will never leave us again.

Perillo. But you tell me that my presence might be harmful or unpleasant. If the sight of me could cause her but one moment of suffering, the slightest painful impression, the least trace of pallor upon her dear cheeks, good God! rather than cost her a single tear, I would begin over again the long journey which I have just made, and exile myself forever from Palermo.

Master Bernard. Have no fear, I will arrange it all.

Perillo. Do you prefer that I should go and take lodgings in another part of the town? I shall find some house in the suburbs; I had a house of my own before I was an orphan. I could stay closely in it all day, so that no one should know of my return. Only in the evening, or early in the morning, perhaps, I should come and rap at your door and ask news of her, for you understand without that I could never exist. Does she then suffer very much?

Master Bernard. You are weeping, my lad! But just listen now; we really must not despair so quickly. We have not heard the last word from this mysterious illness. She is sleeping just now, and I told you that it was a good omen. Let us take our precautions prudently, with care. Above all things, let us have care that she does not see you too quickly. In her present state I should not answer for her.

Scene IV

(*The same. Dame Pâque.*)

Dame Pâque. Your daughter is just awakening, she would like . . . ah, it is you, Signor Perillo? I am delighted to see you again. (*Perillo bows.*) (*Aside.*) Another desperate lover! we could very well have done without his visit. (*Aloud, to her husband.*) Your daughter would like to go into the garden.

Master Bernard. What are you saying to me? Can such a thing be possible? For the last three days she has been scarcely able to stand upon her feet.

Dame Pâque. She is up, she feels much better, the sleep has done her a great deal of good. She wishes to walk, and get a little fresh air.

Master Bernard. Really . . . (*To Perillo.*) You see, my dear Antonio, that I was quite mistaken a moment ago. Here is a change, and a change for the better. She is about to come, so please withdraw for a moment.

Perillo. She is about to come, and I must withdraw! If I dared to ask you one thing . . .

Master Bernard. What is it?

Perillo. Let me see her. I shall hide myself behind this tapestry. Just a moment, so that I may see her pass!

Master Bernard. I am willing, but do not show yourself unless I call you. I am going to do all that I can for you—and you, Dame Pâque, do not breathe a word, I beg you.

Dame Pâque. About your affairs. I am in no hurry, I assure you; I do not care for unsuccessful missions. Here is your daughter; I am going to go into the garden, and carry my great armchair beside the fountain.

(*Perillo hides behind the tapestry.*)

Scene V

(*Master Bernard. Perillo hidden. Carmosine.*)

Carmosine. Well, father, you are uneasy, and you look at me with surprise. You were not expecting to see me up and about like a grown-up person, were you? But it really is I. (*She kisses him.*) Do you recognize me?

Master Bernard. You fill me with joy and also uneasiness. Are you sure that your energy is not greater than your strength?

Carmosine. Oh! I wished to give you even a greater surprise, but I see that mother betrayed me. I wished to go all alone into the garden, and to have you told in confidence that a fair lady from Palermo wished to see you. You would so quickly have taken your fine black

velvet robe, your new cap, and as I had a mask, . . . Well! what would you have said?

Master Bernard. That there is nothing so charming as you; so your ruse would have failed. Alas! dear little Carmosine, how long it is since I have seen you smile?

Carmosine. Yes, I am gay and light-hearted; I do not know why. . . . Because I had a dream, I think. Do you remember Perillo?

Master Bernard. Certainly. What do you mean? (*Aside.*) Singular! she has never been in the habit of speaking of him.

Carmosine. I dreamed that I was standing in our doorway. Some great feast-day was being celebrated, I saw the townspeople passing before me dressed in their finest, the great ladies and knights . . . no, I am mistaken, they were people like us, all our neighbors first and all our friends, then a throng, an innumerable throng which was going down the high street, and which was constantly renewed; and as the stream of people flowed by it grew larger and larger, and all the throng were going to the church, which was ablaze with light. I heard in the distance the sound of the organ, the holy hymns and a celestial music, which arose from a harmony of harps and voices so sweet that never before had such a sound reached my ears. The throng seemed impatient to reach the church

as quickly as possible, as if some great mystery, unique, never to be seen a second time, were being revealed. While I looked upon it all, a strange uneasiness crept over me; but I had no desire to follow. Away in the horizon, on a great plain surrounded by mountains, I saw a traveler walking slowly and painfully along a dusty way. He hastened with all his might, but he made slow progress, and I clearly saw that he wished to come to me. I was awaiting him; it seemed to me that it was he who was to take me to this great fête. I felt his desire and I shared it; I could not tell what were the obstacles that impeded him, but in my thoughts I united my efforts with his. My heart beat violently, but still I remained motionless, unable to take a single step toward him. How long this vision lasted I can not tell—a minute, perhaps; but in my dream it seemed years and years. At last he approached and took my hand, at once the resistible force which had held me chained to the spot gave away, and I was able to walk. An indescribable joy filled me; I had broken my chains, and I was free. As we were setting off, both of us, quick as arrows, I turned toward my phantom and I recognized Perillo.

Master Bernard. And that is what has given you this unexpected gaiety?

Carmosine. Certainly; and judge of my surprise when suddenly awakening I found that my

dream was true, in so far as it had been a happy one for me; that is to say, that I could rise and walk without difficulty. My first thought was to come and throw my arms about your neck, After that I wished to have a little joke, but I failed in my attempt.

Master Bernard. Well, my dear, since this dream has so raised your spirits, and since it is true in one respect, you must also know that it is in another. I hesitated to tell you about it, but now I can have no scruples. Perillo is in this town.

Carmosine. Really, since when?

Master Bernard. Since this morning, and you may see him when you wish. The poor lad will be very happy, for he loves you more than ever. Say the word, and he will be here.

Carmosine. You frighten me. Perhaps he is here.

Master Bernard. No, my child, no, not yet. He is waiting to receive word before showing himself. Would you not be glad to see him? He was not displeasing to you in your dream, and in the olden days he was not displeasing to you. He is doctor of laws now. The little chap with whom you use to play hide-and-seek is quite a personage now, and it is for you that he studied, for you know that he has my promise. I did not mean to speak to you about it, but now, thanks be to God . . .

Carmosine. Never! Never!

Master Bernard. Is it possible? A friend of your childhood, this worthy lad, the only son of my best friend, would you refuse to see him? Has he done anything that you should hate him?

Carmosine. Nothing, no . . . nothing. I do not hate him; let him come if you wish. . . . Ah! I feel that I am dying!

Master Bernard. Oh! do be calm, I beg you; you need not do anything that you do not wish. Do you not know that I allow you to be mistress of yourself? What I said to you was not really serious. It was only to know what you would have thought of it if in case, by chance, . . . but he is not here, he has not come back, he will not come back. (*Aside.*) Wretched man that I am, what have I done?

Carmosine. I am feeling very weak.

(*She sits down.*)

Master Bernard. Merciful heavens! only a moment ago you felt so well, you were regaining strength. I did it all with my stupid tongue which I could not control. Alas! could I know that I should distress you? Poor Perillo came . . . no, I mean . . . After all, it was you who spoke about him to me first.

Carmosine. Enough! enough! in Heaven's name! It was no fault of yours, . . . you did not know . . . you could not know, . . . this dream seemed to me happy. I un-

derstand it clearly now, and it fills me with horror.

Master Bernard. Carmosine! my dearly beloved daughter, by what inconceivable fatality . . .

(*Perillo draws aside the curtain without being seen by Carmosine, he waves good-by to Bernard, and goes out softly.*)

Carmosine. What are you looking at, father?

Master Bernard. What is wrong with you, yourself? You are pale, you are shuddering, what troubles you? Listen to me. In your thought there is a secret which I do not know, and this secret causes this suffering! I do not wish to ask you what it is, but as long as I do not know it, I can not cure you, and I can not let you die. What is there in your heart? Tell it all to me.

Carmosine. Father, you hurt me so when you speak thus to me.

Master Bernard. What would you? I repeat, I can not let you die. You so young, so strong, so beautiful. Do you not trust your own father? Will you tell nothing, will you go away thus? We are rich, my dear; if you have any wishes—young girls sometimes have notions—speak but a word, nothing more, a word in your father's ear. The ill which you suffer is not natural. These false hopes which you raise, these moments of restored health which you feel,

only to plunge again in deeper anxiety; all these contradictions in your speech, all these inexplicable changes, are a torture. You are dying, my child; I shall go mad. Do you wish to bring down your poor old father in grief to the grave, when he implores you. . . .

(*He kneels before her.*)

Carmosine. Father, father, you are breaking my heart.

Master Bernard. I can not keep silence. You must know it. Your mother says that you are love-sick. She has even mentioned a name.

Carmosine. Have pity upon me!

(*She faints.*)

Master Bernard. Ah! wretch, you have assassinated your daughter, your only daughter, hangman that you are. Michel! Wife! she is dying! I have killed her. See! My child is dead!

Scene VI

(*The same. Dame Pâque.*)

Dame Pâque. What do you want? What has happened?

Master Bernard. Quick, vinegar! salts! that bottle, there on the table!

Dame Pâque (*handing him the bottle*). I was sure that your Perillo would play us some bad turn.

Master Bernard. Silence, as you hope for your soul's salvation! Ah! now, she is opening her eyes.

Dame Pâque. Well, my poor angel child, my dear little Carmosine, how do you feel now?

Carmosine. Very well. Where are you going, father? Do not leave me.

Master Bernard. Leave me alone! Leave me alone!

Dame Pâque. What do you wish?

Carmosine. Nothing; why is father going away?

Master Bernard. Why? Why? Because all is lost. God be merciful to me!

Carmosine. Stay, father, do not be uneasy; this will all be over soon.

Dame Pâque. Ser Vespasiano is coming to supper with us. Will you be strong enough to come to table?

Carmosine. Certainly, I shall try.

Dame Pâque. You see that she is consenting.

Master Bernard (*to his wife*). The devil take you, you and your pet. Do you understand nothing, nothing at all?

Carmosine. I am perfectly well now. Is supper ready? Come, father, give me your arm to go down.

Dame Pâque. I gave orders to have the table

brought here. Do not exert yourself, do not try to walk. Here comes Signor Vespasiano.

Master Bernard (*aside*). The deuce take the popinjay fool!

Scene VII

(*The same.*)

Ser Vespasiano (*speaks*). Good evening, dear ladies! Good evening, Master Bernard!

Master Bernard. Good evening; do not speak so loudly.

Ser Vespasiano. What do I see? The pearl of my soul half deprived of consciousness. Her eyes of azure almost closed to the light, and lilies taking the place of roses!

Dame Pâque. It is the third attack in two days.

Ser Vespasiano. Unfortunate father, tender mother, how I do sympathize with your grief!

Carmosine (*to Bernard, who starts to go out*). Father, do not go away.

Ser Vespasiano (*to Bernard*). Your lovely daughter calls you back, Master Bernard.

Master Bernard. Go to the deuce, sir, and leave us in peace in our own home.

(*Supper is brought in.*)

Carmosine (*to her father*). Do not be sad, father dear; come close to me; I am going to pour out a glass of wine for you.

Master Bernard (*sitting down beside her*). Oh, my dear child, why can I not even so pour out for you all the blood left in my old veins, that I might add one day to the days of your life?

(*He drinks.*)

Ser Vespasiano (*sitting down beside Dame Pâque*). After what your husband has just said to me, I scarcely know if I should stay.

Dame Pâque. Surely, you are but jesting! Should a man of merit pay any heed to such things?

Ser Vespasiano. True! That is a most attractive-looking roast!

Carmosine (*to her father*). Tell me, what should I eat. Give me your advice, your counsel.

Master Bernard. Not that, my dear, take this; yes, I think so at least, . . . alas! I do not know.

Ser Vespasiano (*to Dame Pâque*). She turns away her eyes when I look at her, do you think that I shall succeed?

Dame Pâque. Alas! could any one resist you?

Ser Vespasiano. Why am I not allowed to cleave my heart in two with this dagger and to offer half of it to a person whom I respect? . . . It is impossible for me to explain myself. . . .

Dame Pâque. And I am forbidden to listen to you.

(*They hear singing in the street.*)

Carmosine. Do I not hear the voice of Minuccio?

Ser Vespasiano. Yes, my peerless queen, it is Minuccio d'Arezzo himself. He is singing under these windows with his viol in his hand.

Carmosine. Ask him to come up here; he will add gaiety to the supper.

Master Bernard (*at the window*). Hola! Minuccio, my friend, come up and have supper with us. There he is coming up, he is nodding to me.

Ser Vespasiano. He is a remarkable musician, a very good singer and a player upon instruments. The king listens to him gladly, and he has been able, with his songs, to procure the protection of the people about the court. The other evening he played very sweetly upon his guitar, which he brought with him, certain love-songs and very graceful ariettas. There are a half dozen of us who are very good to him.

Master Bernard. Really, in my eyes, that is the least of his merits; not that I fail to appreciate a good song. Nothing goes better at table with a glass of cerigo; but more important than being a skilled musician, a troubadour, as they say, Minuccio for me is an honest man, a good trusty old friend, young and frivolous as he may

seem, the devoted friend of our family, the warmest perhaps that we have left, now that the father of Antonio is dead. That is what I prize in him, and I like his heart better than his viol.

Scene VIII

(*The same. Minuccio.*)

Carmosine. Good evening, Minuccio, since you are singing to the winds that pass, why will you not sing to us?

Minuccio. Sweet Carmosine, a moment ago I was singing, but now I feel more like weeping.

Carmosine. Whence comes this sadness?

Minuccio. From your eyes to mine. How could gaiety dare to linger upon my poor face when we can see it fade and die in the very heart of the flower where we should breathe it?

Carmosine. What is this wonderful flower?

Minuccio. Beauty. God brought it into this world for three good reasons: first to give us joy, in the second place to give us consolation, and lastly to be happy itself. Such is the law of nature, and it is a sin to transgress it.

Carmosine. Do you believe that?

Minuccio. We simply have to look at it to see. Find upon this earth anything more gay, more cheering to the sight than a smile when it is on a fair maiden's lips. What grief could

withstand it? Give me a bankrupt gamester, a broken-down magistrate, a lover in disgrace, a recreant knight, a hypochondriacal politician, the most unfortunate of men; Anthony after Actium, Brutus after Philippi, any one you will; Ebirro poring over manuscripts, an inquisitor without work. Show any of these people merely a soft, peach-colored cheek, with the upturned corner of a crimson lip, where a smile is flitting over two rows of pearls! Not one will be able to defend himself; otherwise I declare him unworthy of pity, for his misfortune is that he is a fool.

Ser Vespasiano (*to Dame Pâque*). He has the lingo, he has the lingo, you can see that he has rubbed against good society.

Minuccio. If then this thing which is frail and light as a fly, as impossible to seize upon as the wind, more impalpable, more delicate than the dust upon the wing of a butterfly, this thing which is called a beautiful woman, rejoices all, and consoles for all, is it not but just that she should be happy, since it is through her that happiness comes to us? The possessor of the richest treasure may, it is true, be but poor if he buries his ducats in the earth, giving it neither to himself not to others. But beauty can not be miserly; the moment that it shows itself, it spends itself lavishly upon all, without ever ruining itself. At the slightest gesture, at the slightest

word, at each step, a fair woman's riches escape, and hover around her without her noticing it. It is in her grace which is like a perfume, in her voice which is like music, in her glance which is like sunlight. It is well, then, that she who gives so much should give somewhat to herself, and have her share in the pleasure which she brings to others. . . . So, Carmosine, smile.

Carmosine. Really your extravagant eloquence deserves to be paid the price, but you, Minuccio, are the happy one. This precious treasure of which you speak is in your joyous spirit. Have you made some new songs for us?

(*She gives him a glass which she fills.*)

Ser Vespasiano. Ah, yes, good friend, just sing us the song that you gave us down below.

Minuccio. Where, magnanimous lord?

Ser Vespasiano. Heavens, my good fellow, in the palace of the king.

Minuccio. It seemed to me, valiant knight, that the king was not *down* there, but *up* here.

Ser Vespasiano. What do you mean, you sly chap.

Minuccio. Have you never seen the marionettes, and do you not know that the man who holds the strings is placed higher than his puppets? And so the little puppets, that he moves about, go here and there, the great barons clad in steel, the fine ladies in ermine robes, the courtiers in velvet pourpoints; then the mob of use-

less ones who are always the most eager and attentive; then the knights of fortune, or chance, if you wish, those whose lance trembles in their hands, and whose foot is unsteady in the stirrup.

Ser Vespasiano. Apparently you like enumerations, but you are forgetting the jugglers and the wandering troubadours.

Minuccio. Your invincible lordship knows very well that those people do not count. They never come in until dessert; the parasite has to pass in before them.

Dame Pâque (to Ser Vespasiano). Your rejoinder has cut him to the quick.

Ser Vespasiano. It was merited, but a little bit harsh. But I do not know but that I should carry things a little bit further.

Dame Pâque. You are jesting, where was the harm?

Ser Vespasiano. He spoke about stirrups that were not solid, and of loosely clasped lances; it was a veiled allusion.

Dame Pâque. To your fall of the other day? That was one of the accidents of battle.

Ser Vespasiano. You are right; I am dying of thirst.

(*He drinks.*)

A Servant (entering). This letter has just been brought.

(*He places it before Master Bernard and goes out.*)

Carmosine. What can you be thinking about, father?

Master Bernard. What am I thinking about?—What is wanted?

Dame Pâque (*who has taken the letter*). It is a message from your dear Antonio.

Master Bernard. Give that to me. The deuce take women and their incessant talk.

Carmosine. If this letter . . .

Master Bernard. It is nothing, my dear, it is a letter from Mares Antonio, my friend in Messina. Your mother made a mistake on account of the similarity of the names.

Carmosine. If this letter is from Perillo, read it to me I beg you.

Master Bernard. Calm yourself, my dear, I repeat . . .

Carmosine. I am very calm, give it to me. There is no one here who stands in the way of it. (*She reads*): "To my second father, Master Bernard: I am soon to leave Palermo. I thank God that I have been permitted for the last time to approach this spot where my life began, and where I leave my life behind me. It is true, for the last six years I cherished a fond hope, and I tried to win by my humble toil, that which might make me worthy of the promise which you made me. Forgive me! I saw your sorrow, and I heard Carmosine . . ." O heavens! . . .

Master Bernard. I beg you give me back this paper.

Carmosine. Do not stop me, I shall go on to the end. (*She continues.*) "And I heard Carmosine say that my sad love was repulsive to her. For a long time I have feared that this application of my poor intelligence to arid studies would bear sterile fruit. You need no longer fear that a single word from my lips will to try recall the past, and to revive the memories of a dream, the sweetest, the only one that I ever have had, the only one that I ever shall have upon this earth. It was too beautiful to be possible; for six years this dream was my life. It was also what supported and impelled me. Now misfortune shows itself to me. To misfortune I really belonged. He was to be my master here below; I salute him and I am going to follow him. Think no longer of me, sir; you are freed from your promise." (*A silence.*) If you are willing, father, I will ask you a favor.

Master Bernard. All that you will, my child. What do you wish?

Carmosine. That you will allow me to remain a moment alone with Minuccio, if he is willing. I have a few words to say to him, and I will send you away into the garden.

Master Bernard. With all my heart. (*Aside.*) Could she, by chance, confide in him rather than in me. God grant it, for the lad

would not fail to tell me about it in turn. Come, Dame Pâque, this way.

Carmosine. Ser Vespasiano, I read before you the letter which you have just heard, so that you may know that I make no mystery of my intention not to marry, and to show you at the same time that arrangements made and even merit itself could not change my determination. Now, then, excuse me.

Scene IX

(*Minuccio and Carmosine.*)

Minuccio. You are moved, Carmosine; this letter has upset you.

Carmosine. Yes, I feel my weakness. Heed well what I now say, for I can not speak long. Minuccio, I have chosen you to confide in you a secret. I hope first of all that you will reveal it to no living creature, save to him of whom I shall tell you; then, as far as it is possible, you will help me, will you not? I beg it of you. You remember, my friend, the day when the coronation of our King Pedro was celebrated. I saw him on horseback at the tournament, and there awoke within me a love for him which reduced me to the condition in which you now see me. I know how ill-seeming it is that I should feel this love for the king. I have tried to cure my-

self of it, but as naught avails me, I resolved to lessen suffering by dying, and that I shall do. But I should go away too unhappy if he did not first of all know of it; and not knowing how to tell him of my intention better than through you (you often see him, Minuccio), I beg you to acquaint him of it. When it is done you will tell me and I shall die less unhappy.

Minuccio. Carmosine, I pledge you my faith, and you may be sure that you can count upon me, and that in so doing you will never be deceived. I esteem you for loving so great a king. I offer you my help, by the aid of which I hope, if you would only take courage, to be able within a few days to bring you back news which will be very precious to you, and that I may lose no time I shall begin the attempt this very day.

Carmosine. Once more I entreat you.

Minuccio. Promise me that you will be brave.

Carmosine. I promise you, and God be with you.

ACT THE SECOND

Scene I

(*In the palace of the king. A hall, a gallery in the background. Perillo. An officer of the palace.*)

Perillo. I may wait here?

The Officer. Yes, sir. Upon his return to

the palace the king is going to stop in this gallery, and all the persons here assembled may approach His Majesty.

(*He goes out.*)

Perillo (*alone*). I was not deceived. Pedro continues that noble custom which was once that of good Saint Louis, in France, of not hiding royal majesty, and of making it accessible to all. I am going then to speak to him, and a word from his lips may change the whole course of my existence. Yesterday would I not have hesitated, would I not have been confused, embarrassed, in the court of this conquering king, who is feared as well as loved. But to-day all is a matter of indifference to me. This palace where power dwells, where reign all the passions, all the vanities and all the hates, is more empty for me to-day than a desert. What could I fear after what I have suffered? Despair lives upon one thought and annihilates all the others.

Scene II

(*Perillo and Minuccio.*)

Minuccio (*marching with great strides*).

> Go now sweet love that gives me misery
> If it be that he cometh not to me.

That is not it; it had a different beginning.

Perillo (*aside*). There is a preoccupied looking man, he does not seem to notice me.

Minuccio (*continuing*).

> He will not come to me nor give me aid,
> I fear, alas, I am a forlorn maid.

This really is amusing; when I finish the last lines I completely forget the first ones. Shall I have to recite my beginning over again? Next I shall forget my ending during that time, and it rests with me to go on so through all eternity, pouring the water of Castalia into the well of the Danaides and no pencil, no pen, no inkhorn! Let us see what this pedant was singing. . . . Well, where the deuce have I stuffed it?

(*He searches in his pockets and draws out a paper.*)

Perillo (*aside*). This personage is not unknown to me . . . is it absence or grief which so dulls my memory? It seems to me that I saw him when I was a child. Really, it is strange. I have forgotten the name of this man, and I remember that I liked him.

Minuccio (*to himself*). Nothing of all this is of the least use to me. There is not a word of common sense in it. No, I think there is in the whole world nothing more provoking, more flat, more hollow, more nauseating, more uselessly inflated than an imbecile who gives you a word

in place of a thought, who shoots beside the mark, who turns Pegasus into a wooden horse, as in running at the ring, to wheeze out one's soul trying to get his rhymes. What was I thinking of when I went to ask this Cipolla to write for me a song on the thoughts of a young girl in love? The idea of putting the spirit of an angel into the brain of a pedant, and no pen, no paper. Ah! here is a young man who has an inkhorn. (*He approaches Perillo.*) Pardon me, sir, may I trouble you? I should like to write a word or two, and I do not know how . . .

Perillo (*giving him the inkhorn which hangs at his girdle*). With pleasure, sir. May I, in my turn, ask you a question? May I presume to ask who you are?

Minuccio (*writing*). I am a poet, sir, I write verses, and at the present moment I am furious.

Perillo. Perhaps I am disturbing you . . .

Minuccio. Not at all. It is a song that I am obliged to write over again because a charlatan spoiled it for me. As a rule, I look after the music only, for I play upon the viol, sir, and the guitar, at your service. You seem to be newly come to court, and you will have need of me. My trade, to tell the truth, is opening hearts. I undertake, in general, bouquets and serenades. I keep a stock of flame and ardor, of ecstasies and deliriums, of arrows and darts, and other lover-like locutions, all upon different airs. I

have a large supply of languishing sighs, of gentle reproaches, tender poutings according to circumstances, and the good pleasure of the ladies. I have a volume in folio of quarrels (as for the reconciliations, they are managed without me); but promises especially are innumerable; I possess a good league of them on virgin parchment. The capitals are illuminated and the birds gilded. In short, people rarely undertake to make love here without my assistance, still less to get married. There is no scholar ever so nimble, no lord so heavy and powerful, that he does not lean upon the bow of my viol. And whether love mounts the marble steps of the palace at the sound of my serenades, or whether he slips down from the balcony of a third-story window on a slight cord, my little muse is at the bottom of the ladder.

Perillo. You are Minuccio d'Arezzo?

Minuccio. Quite right. You know me then?

Perillo. And you, too, do you not know me? Have you, too, forgotten Perillo?

Minuccio. Antonio! . . . Thank God! How right people are in saying that a poet in travail does not know the name of his best friend. And I, who only happen to be rhyming, did not remember your name. (*He embraces him.*) Since when have you been in this town?

Perillo. Since a short time only, . . . and for a short time.

Minuccio. What does that mean? I supposed that you were going to answer me "Forever." Have you not but recently returned from Padua?

Perillo. Do not let us talk about that. You are coming then to court?

Minuccio (*aside*). Idiot that I am. I was forgetting the letter that Carmosine read us. What am I dreaming of? Decidedly my reason is forsaking me; I am more of a poet than I thought. Poor fellow, he must be very sad; and, in conscience, I scarcely know what to say to him. . . . (*Aloud.*) Yes, my friend, the king allows me to come here from time to time, so I seem somewhat to count for something here, but all the favor that is shown me is that of wandering about here. I am thought to be the friend of the king. I am only a bit of his furniture until it pleases him to say to me as he rises from table: "Sing something so that I can fall asleep." . . . But you—who brings you back to this country?

Perillo. I have come to try to enter the army which is marching upon Naples.

Minuccio. You are jesting! You become a soldier, just as you leave the school of laws?

Perillo. I assure you, Minuccio, I am not jesting.

Minuccio (*aside*). Really, his composure

frightens me. It is the composure of deep despair. What can be done? He loves her, and she does not love him. (*Aloud.*) But, my friend, have you well considered this resolution which you are forming so suddenly? Do you think of your studies which you have just finished, and the career which is opening before you?

Perillo. Yes, and I see in it nothing certain but death.

Minuccio. You are in some sorrow—I do not ask you to reveal the cause—I do not try to find it out, but I am much mistaken if, at this moment, you are not following the promptings of your evil genius. Listen to me, and before making your decision wait a few days.

Perillo. He who has no longer anything either to fear or to hope, does not wait.

Minuccio. But if I implored you, asked you as a favor not to make haste . . .

Perillo. What does it matter to you?

Minuccio. You do me an injustice. It seems to me that a moment ago you took me for one of your friends. Hear me—the time is short—the king is about to come—I can not explain to you clearly nor freely what I think. . . . But once again, do nothing to-day. Is it so long to wait until to-morrow?

Perillo. To-day, or to-morrow, or another day, or in ten years, or in twenty years, if you

wish, it is all alike to me. I have ceased counting the hours.

Minuccio. By God! you anger me. I who rocked you when I was a boy and you were a baby, I then must let you go to your destruction without trying to prevent you, now that you are a big boy and I a man. You will grant me nothing. What are you going to do? You have some hidden wound in the heart. What man has not? I do not tell you to struggle at present with your sadness, but I do tell you not to bind yourself to it, not to chain yourself to it irrevocably, for a day will come when it will end. *That* you can not believe, can you? So be it; but remember what I am going to tell you: suffer now if you must, weep if you will, and do not blush at your tears; appear as the most unhappy, the most inconsolable of men. Far from crushing out this sorrow that overwhelms you, tear open your breast to give it free issue, let it burst into sobs, into complainings, and prayers, and menaces; but, I repeat, do not compromise the future. Respect the time upon which you do not wish to count, but which knows more than we do. And for a grief which should be only passing, do not invoke the most lasting of all griefs, regret; regret which revivifies exhausted suffering and which poisons memory.

Perillo. You are perhaps right. Tell me, do you sometimes see Master Bernard?

Minuccio. Oh, yes, . . . of course, . . . as in the olden days.

Perillo. When you see him, Minuccio, tell him of my despair.

Scene III

(*The same. Ser Vespasiano.*)

Ser Vespasiano (*entering*). I shall wait, very well, I shall wait. Gentlemen, the king is coming. (*To Minuccio.*) Ah, it is you, gay bird of passage. I gave you rather rough handling yesterday at supper-time, at our little friend's house, but I do not wish you to bear me any ill will on account of it. The deuce take it, you attacked me under the very eyes of beauty.

Minuccio. I assure you, my lord, that I bear you no ill will; and that if you had vexed me you would have suspected it at once.

Ser Vespasiano. I understand it so; there is a place for every one. If you took it into your head in this palace to make sport of a man of my rank it would not be allowed to pass unnoticed; but you understand that I lay aside my dignity somewhat when I go to see Carmosine, and that there one could not be upon one's high horse.

Minuccio. It was very good of you not to mount it, but if it were merely a question of bringing you down off it . . .

Ser Vespasiano. Now do not be vexed; I forgive you. And really since yesterday I have been having the most wonderful luck in everything. I must tell you about it.

Perillo (*aside*). What sort of fellow is he? He spoke of Carmosine.

Ser Vespasiano. I told you how my heart was set upon having those fields of Ceffalù and of Calatabellote; you know, of course, where they lie.

Minuccio. I beg your pardon, illustrious lord.

Ser Vespasiano. They are arable fields near my pasture lands.

Minuccio. But your pasture lands, where are they?

Ser Vespasiano. Parbleu! near Ceffalù and Calata—

Minuccio. I understand very well; when I was there, so far as I can remember, there was nothing there but stones and mosquitoes.

Ser Vespasiano. Calatabelotte is a fertile region.

Minuccio. Yes, but around this fertile region I say there is nothing but . . .

Ser Vespasiano. You are a wag. I wished to have those lands, not for the money they would bring in to me, but only to round out my property. It would make a wonderfully nice frame for me. The king, to whom they belong,

refuses to give them up to me, waiting, so he said, to make me a present of them upon my wedding-day. The intention was certainly very kind. Yesterday, following a word which I received from good Dame Pâque . . .

Perillo. Could it be possible?

Ser Vespasiano. Do you know her? They are humble but worthy people, to whose house I sometimes go in the evening to give rein to my wit and play to my imagination. The daughter has magnificent eyes, which is telling you enough, for if it were not for that . . .

Minuccio. And her dowry?

Ser Vespasiano. Well, yes, if you wish it, her dowry. These humble people are strong upon amassing money, but that is not what particularly interests me; it is enough for me if the little girl meets with my favor. I mentioned it to the mother, and the good woman simply fell down before me. So yesterday I was asked to supper and I supposed that the matter was settled. . . . Now can you guess the rest, my handsome troubadour?

Minuccio. A little less than before hearing you.

Ser Vespasiano. This Merry Andrew is still jesting. Well, *mordieu*, instead of a feast and a joyful betrothed I see a face streaming with tears, a half-fainting creature, and I am regaled with an epistle.

Minuccio (*in a whisper to Ser Vespasiano*). In Heaven's name, be silent!

Ser Vespasiano. Why make any mystery of it, when the little girl herself told me that she made no mystery of it. What an epistle, good heavens! What a letter! Four pages of lamentations. . . .

Minuccio (*in a whisper*). You forget that I was there, and that I know as much about it as you do.

Ser Vespasiano. No, not at all; as a matter of fact you do not know anything about it, for the point of the whole matter is that I had announced my marriage to the king.

Minuccio. And you were counting upon Ceffalù?

Ser Vespasiano. And Calatabelotte, of course. Now what am I going to answer when the king, upon his return to the palace, cries to me before he dismounts from his steed: "Well, Knight Vespasiano, how fares your betrothal?" It is very embarrassing. You will say to me that when all is said and done the fair lady could not escape me; I know it, but why so much ado? These capricious ways, when I consent to everything, are not complimentary, and are quite beside the question.

Perillo (*in a whisper to Minuccio*). Minuccio, what does all this mean?

Minuccio (*in a whisper*). Can you not see through this personage?

Ser Vespasiano. Moreover, it is not exactly Carmosine whom I would criticize, but her stupid parents. She, for her part, made her intention very clear when she read me that letter from a disdained rival.

Minuccio. Her intention was indeed clear. She said that she wished to remain unmarried.

Ser Vespasiano. Good; those are little ruses, little amiable, coquettish devices by which love is not at all deceived. When a pretty woman tells you that she could not be satisfied with any one, that means: "I will have no one but you."

Perillo. Who, if you please, wrote this letter about which you are speaking?

Ser Vespasiano. Some fellow or other, a certain Antonio, a clerk, I think, a man of the bazoche.

Perillo. I myself have the honor to be one, sir, and I shall trouble you to express yourself somewhat differently.

Ser Vespasiano. I am a gentleman and a knight. Speak a little differently yourself.

Minuccio (*to Ser Vespasiano*). And my advice to you is not to speak at all. (*To Perillo.*) Are you a fool, Perillo, that you should provoke a fool?

Perillo (*while Ser Vespasiano goes away*).

Oh, Minuccio, my poor letter, my poor farewell, written with my tears, the purest sob from the depths of my heart, the most sacred thing in all the world, the last clasp of the hand of a friend who is leaving us. She showed that; she spread it out before this wretch. Oh, ungrateful! ungenerous girl! She sullied the seal of friendship, she prostituted my grief. Good God! I said a moment ago that I could suffer no more, but I had not thought of this.

Minuccio. Promise me, at least . . .

Perillo. Fear nothing, I could not master an outburst of impatience, but all is over and I am calm. (*Looking at Ser Vespasiano, who walks about on the stage.*) Why should I hold it against this unknown man, this ridiculous automaton whom God has made to pass my way? He or another, what matters it? I see in him only destiny, whose blind instrument he is, and I even believe that it should be so. Yes, it is something very ordinary. When a man who is sincere and faithful is smitten in that which he loves best; when some irreparable misfortune breaks his strength and kills hope in him; when he is ill-treated, betrayed, repulsed by all around him, it happens, mark you, almost always, that it is some rake who deals him the final blow and who by chance, without knowing it, meeting the man prostrate upon the ground, walks upon the dagger which is buried in his heart.

Minuccio. I must speak to you; come with me. You must give up this desperate plan which you have decided upon.

Perillo. It is too late!

Scene IV

(*The same. An Officer of the palace. The hall fills up with people.*)

The Officer. Make room, give way.

Ser Vespasiano (*to Minuccio*). So you are on intimate terms with this young man. Tell me, then, do not you think that I should consider myself insulted?

Minuccio. You! magnificent knight?

Ser Vespasiano. Yes, he tried to reduce me to silence.

Minuccio. Well! did you not maintain silence?

Ser Vespasiano. Quite right. Here come Their Majesties; the king looks a little vexed; nevertheless I must speak to him at any cost; for you understand that I shall not wait until he summons me to give an explanation.

Minuccio. And of what?

Ser Vespasiano. My marriage.

Scene V

(*The same. The King. The Queen.*)

The King. Let me never hear of such a thing. Is, then, this unhappy kingdom so accursed by Heaven, so unfriendly to its own repose that it can not maintain peace within while I make war without. What! the enemy is scarce put to flight when he again appears upon our borders, and after I risk for you my own life and that of the Infant, I can not come back here one instant without having to settle your disputes.

The Queen. Pardon them, for the sake of your glory and your fresh success in war.

The King. No, by Heaven! for they are the very ones who would make me lose the fruit of these combats, with their shameful contentions and their peasants' quarrels. One is urged on by pride, another by avarice. They quarrel over a privilege, a jealousy, some grudge; while the whole of Sicily has need of our swords, they draw their knives over some corn-field. Is it for this that French blood has been flowing since the Vespers? What was then your war-cry? "Liberty!" was it not, and the "Fatherland!" and such is the empire of these two great words that they sanctified vengeance. But by what right

did you avenge yourselves if you now dishonor victory? Why did you dethrone a king if you do not know how to be a people?

The Queen. Sire! have they deserved that?

The King. They have deserved still worse, those who trouble the repose of the state; those who are ignorant, or feign to be ignorant of the fact that when a nation has risen in its hate and anger, it must settle down again, like a lion, in its calm and its dignity.

The Queen (in a low voice to those who are present). Do not be alarmed, good people, you know how much he loves you.

The King. There must be solidarity among us. We are all answerable for the hecatombs of Easter Sunday. We must be friends, under penalty of having committed a crime. I did not come among you to pick up from under a scaffold the crown of Conradin, but to bequeath mine to a new Sicily. I repeat it, let us be united; no more dissensions, no more rivalry among the great, nor among the humble. Otherwise, if you do not wish to do this, if, instead of helping one another, as Divine Law commands, you fail in respect for your own laws, by the Rood, I will remind you of them, and the first of you who goes beyond a neighbor's hedge to take away from him a single straw, will have his head cut off at the dividing line which marks the limit of his field. Jerome, take away my sword.

(*The crowd withdraws.*)

The Queen. Let me help you.

The King. You, my dear, do not think of it. This task is not for your dainty hands.

The Queen. Oh, I am very strong when you are a victor. Here, look, Don Pedro, your sword is lighter than my spindle. . . . So the Prince of Salerno is your prisoner?

The King. Yes, and my Lord of Anjou will pay dear for the ransom of this ugly cripple. But why are these people going away?

(*He seats himself.*)

The Queen. Because you scolded them.

The King. Yes, I am a regular barbarian, a regular tyrant, am I not, my dear Constance?

The Queen. They know that you are not.

The King. I have no doubt that you do not fail to tell them so at the very moment when I am angry.

The Queen. Do you prefer to have them hate you? You will not easily succeed in that. And yet, just look, they have all gone away. Your anger must be appeased. There is no one left in the gallery at all but a young man who is walking about there with a very sad, modest bearing. He casts upon us, from time to time, a look which seems to say: "If I only dared." See now, I would wager that he has something very interesting and very mysterious to confide. Do you notice his expression, timid and respect-

ful at the same time? I am sure that he has no quarrel with his neighbor. . . . He is going away. . . . Shall I call him?

The King. Yes, if you wish it.

(*The queen motions to an officer of the palace to go to summon Perillo. The latter approaches the king and kneels upon one knee. The queen seats herself at some distance.*)

The King. Have you something to say to me?

Perillo. I fear that I have been deceived.

The King. Deceived in what?

Perillo. I have been told that the king deigned to permit the most humble of his subjects to approach his sacred person and to make known to him his desires.

The King. For what do you ask?

Perillo. A place in your army.

The King. You can apply to my officers. (*Perillo rises and bows.*) Why did you come to me?

Perillo. Sire, the request which I dare to make may decide the whole of my life. We do not see Providence, but the might of kings resembles it, and God speaks more clearly to them than to us.

The King. You have done well, but you are wearing a costume which does not accord well with a cuirass.

Perillo. I studied to be a lawyer, but to-day I have other projects.

The King. Ah, how is that?

Perillo. I am a Sicilian, and your Majesty was saying a moment ago . . .

The King. The man of law serves his country as well as the man of the sword. You are trying to flatter me. That is not your reason.

Perillo. I pray your Majesty's pardon. . . .

The King. Come, now, speak frankly. You have lost at cards, or your lady-love is dead.

Perillo. No, Sire, no, you are mistaken.

The King. I wish to know the motive which brings you here.

The Queen. But, Sire, he does not care to tell it.

Perillo. Madame, if I had a secret I would wish that it were mine alone and that it were worth telling you.

The Queen. If it is not your own, keep it. That is not the least rare kind of courage.

The King. Very good. Can you ride a horse?

Perillo. I shall learn, Sire.

The King. Do you think so? But just look at those embryo cavaliers of mine who would set out for Palestine and whom a lance blow unseats, as was the case with this poor Ser Vespasiano.

The Queen. But, Sire, is it so very difficult? It seems to me that I, who am only a woman, learned to ride in a very short time, and I should not fear your war-horse.

The King. Really! (*To Perillo.*) What is your name?

Perillo. Perillo, Sire.

The King. Well, Perillo, when you came here you found your lucky star. You see that the queen is for you. Thank her, and sell your cap to buy a helmet.

(*Perillo kneels again before the queen, who gives him her hand to kiss.*)

The Queen. Perillo, you are quite right in wishing to be a soldier rather than a lawyer. Let others than you make their fortunes by delivering long speeches. The first cause of your fortune will be (remember this!) the power which you showed of being able to keep a secret. Profit by the counsel which I give you, for I am a woman and curious, and I can tell you, upon good authority, that the most curious woman, although she may be amused by the person who speaks, esteems only the one who can keep silence.

The King. I tell you it is some unhappy love-affair, which is good for nothing in war.

Perillo. Why, Sire?

The King. Because lovers fight always too much or too little, according as a glance from

their lady-loves makes them avoid or seek death.

Perillo. He who seeks death can also give it.

The King. Begin there; that is the wisest course.

Scene VI

(*The King, the Queen, Minuccio, Ser Vespasiano, several ladies-in-waiting, pages, etc. Perillo, as he goes out, meets Minuccio, and exchanges a few words with him.*)

The King. Who comes there? Is it not Minuccio with that bevy of young girls?

The Queen. It is he himself, and those are my maids-of-honor who are teasing him, doubtless to try to get him to sing. Oh, I beg you, do call him; I love him so! There is no one at the court who gives me as much pleasure as he does. He writes such pretty songs.

The King. I love him, too, but with less ardor. Minuccio, draw near, draw near; and let a glass of wine of Cyprus be brought to give him an inspiration. He will sing something for us, after his fashion.

Minuccio (*to Vespasiano*). Withdraw now, the king has called me.

Ser Vespasiano. Good! good! the queen beckoned me.

Minuccio (*aside*). I shall never get rid of

him. It was his fault that Perillo escaped a moment ago in the crowd.

(*A servant brings a bottle of wine, the officer at the same time hands a paper to the king, who reads it and throws it to one side.*)

The Queen. Well, you naughty little chatter-boxes, here you are again, as usual, teasing poor Minuccio.

First Maid-of-Honor. We wish him to give us a ballad.

The Second Maid-of-Honor. And some disputations in rhyme.

The Third Maid-of-Honor. And some conundrums.

The Queen (*to Minuccio*). Do you know I have a complaint to make to you. When the king arrives then we see you appear, but as soon as I am alone you are not to be seen.

Ser Vespasiano (*coming forward*). Your Majesty is greatly mistaken; not a day passes without my being seen in this palace.

The Queen. Good day, Vespasiano, good day.

Minuccio (*aside*). What is going to become of him now. He is a soldier; he will be obliged to leave.

The King (*reading with a preoccupied air, and speaking to Minuccio*). I am glad to see you; you are going to tell me the news. Come drink a glass of wine.

Ser Vespasiano (*drinking*). Your Majesty is very kind indeed. My marriage has not yet taken place.

The King. It's you, Vespasiano! Well, some other day.

Ser Vespasiano. Certainly, Sire, certainly. (*Aside.*) He does not speak of Calatabelotte. (*To the maids-of-honor.*) What do you see to laugh at, you people?

First Maid-of-Honor. Ah, you people!

Ser Vespasiano. Yes, you and the others! The king asks me a question, and I answer. What is there so funny about that?

Second Maid-of-Honor. Ah! fine Sir Knight, how is your horse since last we saw you?

Third Maid. We were so alarmed for him.

First Maid. And your helmet?

Second Maid. And your lance?

Third Maid. Have you settled them back again?

Ser Vespasiano. I do not give any heed to women's jesting.

First Maid. We are asking you questions, answer; otherwise we shall say that you are no more skilful at knightly repartee than . . .

Ser Vespasiano. Well?

Second Maid. Than in warding off a knightly lance.

Ser Vespasiano (*aside*). Ill-bred little parrots!

The Queen. Minuccio is so preoccupied that he does not hear what is being said near him.

Minuccio. That is true and I very humbly beg Your Majesty's pardon. Since yesterday I have been able to think of nothing but this poor young girl, . . . no, this poor young fellow. . . . No, I am mistaken, it is a ballad which I am trying to recall.

The Queen. A ballad? You will recite it to us presently. My young friends here are calling for some conundrums. Ask them some questions by way of diversion—Ser Vespasiano.

Ser Vespasiano. Your Majesty.

The Queen. Are you good at making up answers?

Ser Vespasiano (*aside*). It is the same joke again. (*Aloud.*) It is not my fault, madame, truly, it is not my fault.

The Queen. Of what are you speaking?

Ser Vespasiano. Of my marriage. It was in spite of my efforts, I assure you, that it has not taken place.

The Queen. Some other time, some other time.

Ser Vespasiano. Your Majesty shall be satisfied. (*Aside.*) "Another day," the king said; "another time," the queen added; and when I bowed they spoke to me very familiarly, so that I am at the height of favor, and at the same time

I feel greatly relieved. As soon as I can slip away, I shall fly to my fair one.

The King (*continuing to read*). This is a nice state of affairs. Charles the Lame is crying out upon one side, and Charles of Anjou upon the other. Were you not speaking of conundrums?

The Queen. Yes, Sire, and if it pleases you to give orders . . .

The King. You know that I understand nothing about such matters. But, no matter. Come, Minuccio, get these young girls to chatter a little for us.

(*They all sit down in a circle.*)

Minuccio. Which is better, young ladies, to possess or to hope?

Ser Vespasiano. It is much better to possess.

Minuccio. Why so, magnificent lord?

Ser Vespasiano. Why, because, . . . why, it is most evident.

First Maid. But what if what one possesses is an empty purse, an overly long nose, or a sword-cut?

Ser Vespasiano. Then hope would be preferable.

Second Maid. If what you hope for is the hand of a young girl who will have nothing to do with you, and who makes fun of you . . .

Ser Vespasiano. Ah! the deuce, in that case I scarcely know what to say.

First Maid. One must have a great deal of patience.

Second Maid. And hope for a little pleasure.

Minuccio (*to the third maid*). And you, my fair maid, you say nothing.

Third Maid. Because your question is not a question at all, since we are told that hope is the only real good which we can possess.

The Queen. Ser Vespasiano has lost. Another question, Minuccio.

Minuccio. Which is better, a lover who dies from love, because he no longer sees his mistress, or the lover who dies of pleasure at seeing her again?

The Maids (*together*). The one who dies! the one who dies!

Ser Vespasiano. But since they both die!

The Maids. The one who dies! the one who dies!

Ser Vespasiano. But you were told . . . you were only asked . . .

First Maid. We care only for lovers who die of love.

Ser Vespasiano. But notice, there are two causes . . .

Second Maid. They are the only ones who really love.

Ser Vespasiano. Nevertheless . . .

Third Maid. And never shall we have any others.

The King. Which are better, young maidens who are wise, reserved and silent, or little hare-brains, who chatter and prevent my finishing what I am reading. Let us see, Minuccio, where is your viol?

Minuccio. By your leave, Sire, I shall not make use of it. The music of my new ballad has not yet been written. I know only the words.

The King. Very good, then, and you, young ladies, . . .

First Maid. Sire, we will not say a single word more.

Ser Vespasiano (aside). For my part, I have had enough of poet's-play and *canzones* like that. Their Majesties ordered me to hasten the day of my wedding . . . so who can resist me now . . . I shall slip away and fly to my fair one.

Scene VII

(*The same, except Ser Vespasiano.*)

The Queen (to Minuccio). Are the words yours?

Minuccio. No, madame.

The Queen. Are they Cipolla's?

Minuccio. Still less.

The King. Begin, anyway. After a combat still better than after a feast, I love to hear a song. The more sweet and quiet the poetry

is, the more agreeably does it give rest to the weary ear. For a battle is a great tumult, and a mace blow on the head almost . . . (*The maids utter a cry.*) Silence! First of all, recite your *canzone*. Afterward you will tell us who the author is. So we shall be able to judge more fairly.

Minuccio. Your Majesty laughs at the principles; what would become of literary justice if its eyes were blindfolded like the other's? The author of my ballad is a young girl.

The Queen. Really?

Minuccio. A young girl who is charming, beautiful and wise, lovely and modest, and my ballad is a love plaint.

The Queen. Then, lovely as she is, is she not in turn beloved?

Minuccio. No, madame, and her love is such that she would die for it. Heaven has given her all that can make a woman pleasing, and at the same time make her happy. Her father, who is rich and learned, loves her with all his soul, or rather idolizes her, and he would sacrifice all that he possesses to satisfy the least of his daughter's desires. She has only to say the word, and she would see at her feet a crowd of eager admirers, young, handsome, brilliant; noblemen, even, though she herself is not of noble birth. Nevertheless, until she had reached her eighteenth year her heart had not yet spoken. Of

all those who were attracted by her charms, only one, the son of an old friend, had not been dismissed. In the hope of winning a fortune, and of seeing his efforts rewarded, he went into voluntary exile, and for long years he studied to be a lawyer.

The King. Another lawyer?

Minuccio. Yes, Sire. And now he has come back, more happy than he is proud at having acquired his new title, counting, moreover, upon the promise of the father and asking no other response than that he be allowed to hope. But, during his absence, the indifferent and cruel beauty met to her own harm the one who should avenge Love. One day she was standing at her window with some of her friends when she saw a knight pass by on his way to the queen's festival; she followed this knight; she saw him at the tournament where he was victorious, . . . one glance decided her life.

The King. That is a singular romance.

Minuccio. Since that day she has been plunged into the deepest melancholy, for the one whom she loves can not belong to her. He is married to a woman . . . who is the most beautiful, the best, the most charming perhaps in this whole kingdom, and he finds a mistress in a faithful consort. The poor disdained girl labors under no delusion. She knows that her foolish passion must remain deep in her heart,

and she constantly schools herself so that no one can divine her secret. She avoids every occasion of again seeing the object of her love. She even forbids herself to pronounce his name. But the unfortunate girl can not sleep, her mind is weakening, and a fatal languor makes her grow paler from day to day. She will not speak of what she loves, and she can think of nothing else. She refuses every consolation, every distraction; she sets aside the remedies which her distracted father offers her. She is dying, she is being consumed, she is melting away like the snow in the sun. At last, upon the very edge of the tomb, grief obliges her to break her silence; her lover does not know her, he has never addressed a word to her, perhaps he has never seen her; she does not wish to die without him knowing why, and she has decided to write to him as follows: (*He reads.*)

" Go now, Love, who causest my pain, tell my lord that of this sorrow I shall die, and that Death had seemed to me less cruel if he had but come to my aid.

" On bended knees, I beg for grace. I pray you, Love, go to his dwelling-place. Tell him that I here so weep and pray that I must surely die, aflame with love, and knowing not the hour when my dear sorrow will cease.

" Death awaits me, and if he raise me not from the grave yawning before me, in it I shall sleep

carrying with me my sweet dream. Ah! Love! Alas! Tell him of my woe. Since the day when a victor I saw him, Love, you have forced me to love him.

"I have not had the heart, were it but for a moment, to reveal to him my timid thought, which now so weighs me down. Dying thus, how I fear Death! But who knows if it would displease him to see my sorrow written on my pale face? I have not the courage to avow my passion. Alas! Love! Tell him of my woe!

"Since, Love, you have not wished to accord to my sadness this joy that my gentle lord should read in my heart, nor see my tears, tell him, at least, that had I not seen him, I should have lived. Tell him than one day a maid of Sicily saw him doing his duty in combat. In his country tell him to remember this, and that avowing my sad love, I die."

The Queen. You say that this ballad is written by a young girl?

Minuccio. Yes, madame.

The Queen. If that is true, you will tell her that she has a friend and you will give her this ring.

(*She takes a ring from her finger.*)

The King. But for whom did she write this song? It would seem from the last words that it must be for a foreigner. Do you know him? What is his name?

Minuccio. I may tell it to your Majesty, but to your Majesty alone.

The King. Ah, what a mystery!

Minuccio. Sire, I have pledged my word.

The King. Withdraw, then, ladies. I am curious to know his secret. As for the queen, you know that I am alone when only she is with me.

(*The young ladies go to the rear of the stage.*)

Minuccio. Sire, I know it, and I am ready.

The Queen. No, Minuccio. I thank you for having so high an opinion of me as to be willing to trust your honor to me, but, since you have pledged your word, for this moment I am not your queen; I am only a woman who does not wish to be the cause of an honorable gentleman's being able to reproach himself.

(*She goes out.*)

The King. Well, and to whom are these verses addressed?

Minuccio. Has your Majesty forgotten who was victor in the last tournament?

The King. By the Rood! it was I myself.

Minuccio. And it is to you yourself also that these verses are addressed.

The King. To me, do you say?

Minuccio. Yes, Sire, all of what I have told is perfectly true. This young girl whom I painted to you, as beautiful, young, charming, and dying of love, really exists. She lives over

there, just a step away from the palace. Let one of your officers accompany me and give you an account of what he can see there. The poor child is waiting for death. It is at her request that I speak to you. Her beauty, her suffering, her resignation are as true as her love—Carmosine is her name.

The King. This is very strange.

Minuccio. And this young man to whom her father had promised her, who went to study at Padua, and who expected to marry her upon his return, your Majesty saw him this very morning. He it was who came to ask to be allowed to enter the army of Naples. He will die, too, I promise you, and sooner than she, for he will take his own life.

The King. I suspected it; but that should not be, that shall not be. I wish to see this young girl.

Minuccio. The extreme weakness in which she is . . .

The King. I shall go. That seems to surprise you.

Minuccio. But, Sire, I fear that your presence . . .

The King. Did you not say a moment ago that you would have spoken of it before the queen?

Minuccio. Yes, Sire.

The King. Come to her with me.

ACT THE THIRD

Scene I

(*A garden. At the left a fountain with several seats and a bench; at the right the house of Master Bernard; in the background a terrace and a grille. Carmosine, seated on the bench. Near her Perillo and Master Bernard. Minuccio, seated on the edge of the fountain with his guitar in his hand.*)

Carmosine. "Go now Love who causes my pain." . . . How this song delights me, my dear Minuccio!

Minuccio. Do you wish me to begin it over again? We are at your orders, I and my instrument.

(*He indicates the neck of his guitar.*)

Carmosine. Do not be so obliging, for if I made you repeat it a hundred times, I should still wish to hear it again, until my attention and my strength were exhausted, and would that I could die dreaming of it. What do you think of it, Perillo?

Perillo. Charming, when you recite it.

Master Bernard. It seems to me too somber. I do not know what a lugubrious song is. It

seems to me that, in general, people do not sing unless they are gay. At least, when it happens to me . . . but that does not happen any more.

Carmosine. Why, then, and what fault do you find with this ballad of our friend's? There is no buffoonery about it, it is true, like a table jingle, but what matter? Is there no other way of pleasing? It speaks of love, but do you not know that it is necessary fiction, and that one could not pretend to be a poet without pretending to be in love? It speaks, too, of sorrow and regret, but is it not admitted that lovers in poetry are always the happiest people in the world, or the most wretched? "Go tell Love who causes my pain," . . . What comes next?

Master Bernard. Nothing good; I do not care for that.

Carmosine. It is a Spanish ballad, and our king, Don Pedro, loves it very much; is it not true, Minuccio?

Minuccio. So he told me, and the queen approved of it very warmly.

Master Bernard. Great good may it do them. It sounds like funeral music.

Carmosine. Perillo is, perhaps, although he does not say so, of the same opinion as my father, for I see that he is sad.

Perillo. No, I swear to you . . .

Carmosine. It would be very wrong; for it

would make me think that you had not altogether forgiven me.

Perillo. Do you think that?

Carmosine. I hope not, nevertheless, I feel very guilty, I feel very foolish, very ungrateful; and you, poor friend, you have come back from so far, you had been absent so long a time. But you must excuse me; I was so suffering and wretched yesterday.

Master Bernard. And now . . .

Carmosine. Fear nothing more; this time my ills are going to come to an end.

Master Bernard. Yesterday you said the same thing.

Carmosine. Oh, I am very sure of it to-day. Yesterday I felt comfortable for a moment, then I suffered, . . . but let us say no more of yesterday, unless it be, Perillo, that you may repeat to me that you have forgotten all about it.

Perillo. Can I think for a single moment of myself when I see you returning to life? I have suffered nothing if I only see you smile.

Carmosine. Forget, then, your grief, as I forget my sadness. Minuccio, I wished to ask you . . .

Minuccio. What are you looking for?

Carmosine. Let me see where is your ballad? It seems to me that I have forgotten a word.

(*Minuccio gives her a written copy of the ballad, she reads it over softly.*)

Scene II

(The same. Ser Vespasiano. Dame Pâque coming out of the house.)

Ser Vespasiano (to Dame Pâque). What did I say to you? That could not fail. What a delightful family picture.

Dame Pâque. There is really no one like you for arranging everything.

Ser Vespasiano. Oh, that was nothing at all. One word, fair lady, one word was sufficient. I only repeated exactly to your amiable daughter what Their Majesties said to me.

Dame Pâque. And she consented?

Ser Vespasiano. Not exactly. You know that the modesty of a young girl . . .

Carmosine (rising). Ser Vespasiano.

Ser Vespasiano. My princess.

Carmosine. You are paying your court to my mother, otherwise I was going to ask for your arm.

Ser Vespasiano. My arm and my sword are at your service.

Carmosine. No, I do not wish to intrude. Come, Perillo, let us go to the terrace.

(She goes away with Perillo.)

Ser Vespasiano (to Dame Pâque). You see she casts upon me very flattering glances. But

who is this little Perillo? I must confess to you that it annoys me to see him. He assumes the airs of a lover, and if it were not for my respect for you, I do not know what would prevent me from . . .

Dame Pâque. Can you think of it? Could one be so venturesome. You are too hot-headed, sir.

Ser Vespasiano. It is true. You were saying, madame, with regard to the dowry . . .

(*They walk off together.*)

Scene III

(*Minuccio and Master Bernard.*)

Master Bernard. Do you believe in all that, Minuccio?

Minuccio. Yes, I listen, I observe, and I think that all is for the best.

Master Bernard. Do you believe in this kind of gaiety? But you yourself, are you perfectly sincere? Why do you not wish to tell me what she confided in you yesterday, when you were alone together?

Minuccio. I have already told you that I have nothing to tell you. She charged me, as you see, to bring Perillo back to her. Scarcely had the hawk tried on its hood when it came back to the nest.

Master Bernard. This is all very strange, very obscure. And this refrain that you sing to her is only food for her sadness . . .

Minuccio. You see, on the contrary, that it merely serves to drive it away. Do you think that I am trying to do harm?

Master Bernard. No, indeed, but I can not help thinking . . .

Minuccio. Be calm until the hour of vespers.

Master Bernard. Why until that hour? This is the third time that you have repeated the same thing to me without ever explaining it.

Minuccio. I can tell you no more about it, for I myself do not know more. The most beautiful maiden gives only what she has, and the most devoted friend is silent upon a subject of which he is ignorant.

Master Bernard. The deuce take your mysteries! What is being prepared for that hour? What event are we to see take place? Is the king himself coming in person to pay us a visit?

Minuccio (*aside*). He does not know how near the truth he is. (*Aloud.*) My kind old friend, keep up a good hope. If everything can not be arranged as we wish, I shall break my guitar over my knee.

Master Bernard. Much good that would do us. However, we shall see, since in any case we must have patience. But I shall not forgive you this way of doing things.

Minuccio. That will come later, I hope. Once more, do you doubt me?

Master Bernard. Ah, no, foolish as you may be, with your ill-tempered secretiveness . . . Listen, I must tell you all, although you will not tell me anything. One thing here makes me more than doubt, makes me shudder, do you understand: last night, urged on by my uneasiness, I quietly approached Carmosine's room and listened to hear if she were sleeping. Through the crack of the door, between the wall and the hinge, I saw her sitting up in her bed with the candle near her. She was writing from time to time and seemed plunged in deep reflection. Then she would take her pen with frightful rapidity, as if she were obeying some sudden impression. My uneasiness upon seeing her, or my curiosity became too strong, I entered: at once her light was put out, and I heard the noise of the paper as she slipped it under her pillow.

Minuccio. It was some word of farewell for poor Antonio, who, so he thinks, has become a soldier.

Master Bernard. My daughter did not know it.

Minuccio. Ah, no! does a lover go away in silence? He would not even drown himself without telling about it.

Master Bernard. I do not know anything about it, but I should almost believe . . .

There is that idiot coming back again with my wife. Let us go in; I wish you to know everything.

Minuccio. It was also your daughter who summoned him back. You see, she thinks of nothing but merriment.

(*They go into the house.*)

Scene IV

(*Ser Vespasiano and Dame Pâque come from the rear of the garden.*)

Ser Vespasiano. With regard to the dowry I am satisfied, and I leave you to hasten to the notary's in order to seal the contract.

Dame Pâque. And I, sir, I am delighted that you are so well disposed.

Ser Vespasiano. But why, then? The dowry is well enough . . . and your daughter too. . . . My principal aim is to become connected with your family.

Dame Pâque. My husband will make some objections. Between you and me, he is a poor creature. A man who calculates . . . who is fussy.

Ser Vespasiano. Ah, that is my affair. We shall have a wedding, take my word for it, which will be perfectly magnificent. The king will come to it.

Dame Pâque. Really?

Ser Vespasiano. He will dance at it, and with you yourself, Dame Pâque. You will be the queen of the ball.

Dame Pâque. Ah, such pleasures as those are no longer suitable for me.

Ser Vespasiano. You will see them spring up again under your footsteps; but now I fly to the notary.

Scene V

(*Carmosine and Perillo come from the rear.*)

Carmosine. You must promise me this, Antonio. Think of what would become of my father, if God took me away from this world.

Perillo. Why these cruel thoughts? You were not despondent a moment ago.

Carmosine. Think that I am what he loves best, almost his only joy upon earth. If he should come to lose me, I really do not know how he could bear this sorrow. Your father was his last friend, and when you were left an orphan, you remember, Perillo, that this home became yours. When people saw us growing up together they said in the neighborhood that Master Bernard had two children; if he should to-day have only one left . . .

Perillo. But you were telling us to hope.

Carmosine. Yes, my friend; but you must

promise me to take care of him and not to forsake him. . . . I know that you have made a request and that you are thinking of leaving Palermo, but, listen to me, you still can . . . It seems to me that I heard a noise.

Perillo. It is nothing, I see no one.

Carmosine. You can still renounce your determination; I am convinced of it, I know it. I do not speak to you of this step, nor of the motive which dictated it; but if it is true that you love me, you will take my place after me.

Perillo. Nothing after you!

Carmosine. You will accept my bequest, if you are a true man. I bequeath my father to you.

Perillo. Carmosine! . . . you speak, in truth, as if you had one foot in the grave. This ballad which a short time ago you took pleasure in repeating—I am not mistaken, I am sure of it—is your own story; it was made for you, it is your secret. You wish to die.

Carmosine. Be careful, do not speak so loudly.

Perillo. Well, what matters if I am heard, if what I say is the truth? If you are cherishing in your heart this frightful idea, of voluntarily departing life, of hiding from us your suffering, until we see you suddenly expire in our midst. . . . What am I saying? Good God, what a horrible suspicion! If it could be possible, that

wearied by suffering, faithful only to your frightful silence, you had conceived the thought of suicide. While recommending your father to me you could not wish to kill his daughter. . . .

Carmosine. There is no need of it, my friend. Death has nothing to do with so feeble a hand.

Perillo. But you wish it to come, then? Why do you deceive your father? Why do you assume before him this repose, this hope which you do not feel, this joy which is so far from you?

Carmosine. Not so far as you may think. When God calls us to Him he sends us, I do not doubt it, secret messengers who warn us. I have not done much good, but neither have I done great harm. The thought of appearing before the Supreme Judge has never caused me fear. He knows it, and I have told Him so. He pardons me and encourages me. I hope, I hope to be happy. I have already delightful presages.

Perillo. You love Him very much, Carmosine?

Carmosine. Of whom are you speaking?

Perillo. I can not tell, but death alone has not such attractions.

Carmosine. Listen to me. Do not make vain conjectures, and do not try to penetrate secrets which would do no one any good. You will learn of it when I shall be no more. You

ask why I deceive my father? It is exactly for this reason: that in opening my heart to him I should merely be doing something cruel and useless. I should not have spoken to you as I have done, if in so doing I had not done a duty. I ask you not to betray the confidence which I have had in you.

Perillo. You may be without a fear. But, on your side, promise me, at least . . .

Carmosine. It is enough. Consider, my friend, that there are ills for which there is no remedy. You are to go now into my room. You will open a box which is behind the pillow of my bed. In it you will find a holiday gown. I shall never wear it again. I wore it at the queen's festival, when, for the first time . . . underneath it is a written paper, which you will take and which you will keep; I confide it to you, . . . to you alone, you understand?

Perillo. Your will, Carmosine?

Carmosine. Oh, it is not worthy of being so called. What is there in the world of which I could dispose? They count for very little, these farewells which we leave, in spite of ourselves, to life, and which we call our last will. You will find your share in it, Perillo.

Perillo. My share! Good God, what a horror! . . . Do you think it possible . . .

Carmosine. Spare me! spare me! We shall speak of it again presently in my room; but I

am going to go in, it is growing late, it is the hour of vespers.

Scene VI

Carmosine (*alone*). Your share, poor excellent heart. It would have been more sweet, and you deserved it too, if pitiless fate had not made me meet . . . Mighty God! what is this blasphemy that issues from my lips? O my grief, my dear grief, should I dare to complain of you? you, my only possession; you, my life and my death; you whom he now knows? O good Minuccio, worthy, honest friend, he listened to you, you told him all; he smiled, he was touched. He sent me a ring. . . . (*She kisses it.*) You will rest with me when I lie quiet. Ah! what joy! what happiness this morning when I heard these words: "He knows all." What matter now my tears, and my suffering, and all the tortures of death? He knows that I weep, he knows that I suffer. Yes, Perillo was right; this joy before my father was cruel, but could I restrain it? If I merely looked at Minuccio, my heart beat so violently! He saw him, he spoke to him. O love! O inconceivable delight! O delicious suffering, you are satisfied! I die happy and my every wish is gratified. Did he understand it and send you this ring? Did he feel that, in saying I loved, I said that

I was going to die? Yes, he has understood me, he has divined my feeling, he has put upon my finger this ring which will remain in my tomb when I shall be nothing but a handful of dust. . . . Thanks be to Thee, O my God! I am going to die, and I can die. (*They hear the bell of the garden gate ringing.*) Somebody is ringing at the gate, I think. Michel! Michel! is there no one here? How did they come to leave me alone? (*She approaches the house.*) They are all there together. They are reading something attentively and seem to be consulting together. Minuccio seems to be keeping them there. . . . Can Perillo have betrayed me? (*The bell rings a second time.*) There are two veiled ladies ringing. Michel, where are you? Do open the gate.

Scene VII

(*Carmosine. The Queen. Michel opening the gate. A woman who accompanies the Queen remains in the background.*)

The Queen. Does not Master Bernard, the physician, live here?

Michel. Yes, madame.

The Queen. May I speak to him?

Michel. I shall go and call him.

The Queen. Wait a moment; who is this young girl?

Michel. It is Carmosine.

The Queen. The daughter of your master?

Michel. Yes, madame.

The Queen. That is all. It is she whom I wish to see.

Scene VIII

(*Carmosine. The Queen.*)

The Queen. Pardon me, but . . . (*Aside.*) She is very pretty. (*Aloud.*) You are the daughter of Master Bernard?

Carmosine. Yes, madame.

The Queen. May I, without intruding, ask you for a moment's conversation. (*Carmosine signs to her to sit down.*) You do not know me.

Carmosine. I can hardly say . . .

The Queen (*sitting down*). I am connected, —somewhat distantly connected—with a young man who lives here, I believe, and who is called Perillo.

Carmosine. He is in the house, if you wish to see him.

The Queen. Presently, if you will allow me. I am a stranger here, and I occupied a somewhat high position at the court of Spain. I feel a very great interest in this young man, and it is possible that some day my influence may be useful to him.

Carmosine. He certainly merits it in every respect.

(*Master Bernard and Minuccio appear in the doorway of the house.*)

Master Bernard (*in a whisper to Minuccio*). Who can that be with my daughter?

Minuccio. Not a word; come with me.

(*He takes him away with him.*)

The Queen. That is exactly the point upon which I wished for further information, and I again ask pardon for what may seem strange in the course which I am pursuing.

Carmosine. It seems a very natural one, madame. But my father is better able to answer you than I am. I will go, if you will allow me, . . .

The Queen. No, I beg you to remain. Not unless I am troubling you. You are ill, so I have heard.

Carmosine. Slightly, madame.

The Queen. One would never think it.

Carmosine. The malady from which I suffer is not always evident, although it never leaves me.

The Queen. It can not be serious at your age.

Carmosine. At all times God does what He wills.

The Queen. I am sure that He does not wish to do you any great harm. But my fear of wearying you compels me to make my questions

precise, for I do not wish to conceal from you the fact that it is from you, and you only, that I could wish for an answer; and I am persuaded that an answer from you will be frank and honest. You were brought up with this young man, you have known him since his childhood. Is he an honest man, is he a man of real feeling?

Carmosine. Such I certainly judge him to be; but, madame, I am not a competent judge.

The Queen. I wholly accept your judgment.

Carmosine. But why this honor which you do me? I can not well understand why, without knowing me . . .

The Queen. I know you better than you think, and the proof that I have every confidence in you is the question which I am going to ask you, begging you at the same time to excuse it, but to answer it frankly: you are beautiful, young, and rich, so they say; if this young man of whom we speak should ask for your hand, would you marry him?

Carmosine. But, madame . . .

The Queen. Supposing, of course, that your heart were free, and that no previous tie of yours should stand in the way of this alliance?

Carmosine. But, madame, what is your object in asking this?

The Queen. I ask because I have a friend, a young girl who is as beautiful as your are, who is just of your age, and who is, like you, not in

perfect health. The cause of her illness is some melancholy, or some secret grief which she hides. I scarcely know what it is, but my plan is, if possible, to have her married and bring her to court that I may give her some distraction, for she leads a very quiet and lonely life. You know how dangerous it is for a young girl who has romantic ideas to give herself wholly up to brooding over desires and delusions, to build hope on all that she half sees, and to regard all that she can not see as the future. She clings to a dream out of which she makes for herself the whole world, innocently and thoughtlessly, as the result of her loving nature, and, alas! in her pursuit after the impossible, very often lets happiness pass by.

Carmosine. That is cruel.

The Queen. Beyond words. How many have I seen, the fairest, the noblest and the wisest, destroy their youth and sometimes their life, through keeping such secrets.

Carmosine. Can it bring death, madame?

The Queen. Yes, it can, and those who deny it, or laugh at it, have never known what love is, neither in dreams or otherwise. A man, doubtless, should be able to protect himself from it. Thought, courage, strength, the habit of activity, and especially military life, should save him, but a woman! Deprived of what she loves, where is her support? If she has courage, where

is her strength? If she has an occupation, were it the most trying possible, one which exacts the greatest application, who can say where her thoughts are while her eyes follow the needle, or while her foot makes the spinning-wheel go round.

Carmosine. How your words delight me!

The Queen. I am saying what I think. So often it is to avoid being obliged to bestow pity that we will not believe in sorrow. But these sorrows are real, and all the deeper because the world, which laughs at them, obliges us to hide them. Our resignation is a form of modesty. We do not wish this veil to be touched. We had rather bury ourselves in it, and day by day we become accustomed to our suffering, we give ourselves up to it, we abandon ourselves to it, we devote ourselves to it, we love it, we love death. . . . So you see why I should like to try to save my young friend.

Carmosine. And you are thinking of marrying her? Is Perillo the one whom she loves?

The Queen. No, my child, it is not he; but if he is such as I have been told, good, brave, honest (learned, matters little), would his wife not be happy?

Carmosine. Happy, if she loves another?

The Queen. You do not answer my first question. I had asked you to tell me if in your personal opinion Perillo seems to you to be

worthy of having the happiness of a woman entrusted to him? Answer, I conjure you.

Carmosine. But if she loves another, madame? Must she then forget him?

The Queen (*aside*). I shall not be able to get more from her on this score. (*Aloud.*) Why forget him? Who asks her to do this?

Carmosine. As soon as she is married, it seems to me . . .

The Queen. Well, finish out your thought.

Carmosine. Does she not commit a crime, if she can not give all her heart, all her soul . . .

The Queen. I have not told you all, but I should be afraid . . .

Carmosine. Do speak, I beg you. I, too, am interested in your friend.

The Queen. Well, suppose that he whom she loves, or imagines she loves, could not belong to her; suppose he himself were married.

Carmosine. What do you say?

The Queen. Suppose, even more. Imagine that he is a very great lord, a prince; that the rank which he occupies, the very name which he bears, raises forever between her and him an insurmountable barrier. . . . Imagine that it is the king. . . .

Carmosine. Ah, madame, who are you?

The Queen. Imagine that the sister of this prince, or his wife, if you will, has been informed of this love, which is my young friend's

secret, and that, far from feeling toward her aversion or jealousy, she has undertaken to console her, to persuade her, to act as her support, to bring her out of her retreat, and to give her a place near her in the very palace of her husband. Suppose that she finds it perfectly simple, that this victorious husband, the most valiant knight of his kingdom, should have inspired a sentiment which every one can easily understand; suppose, further, that she has no mistrust, no fear of her young rival: not through lack of appreciation of her beauty, but from confidence in her honor; suppose, finally, that she wishes this child, who dared to love so great a prince, should dare to avow it, in order that this love, sadly hidden in solitude, should become purified by being exposed to the light of day, and should be ennobled by its very cause.

Carmosine (*bending the knee*). Ah, madame, you are the queen!

The Queen. You see then, my child, that I do not tell you to forget Don Pedro.

Carmosine. I shall forget him, do not doubt me, madame, if death can make me forget. Your goodness is so great that it seems the goodness of God Himself. It fills me with admiration, with respect, and with gratitude; but it overwhelms me and puts me to shame, it makes me feel only too keenly how unworthy I am of being the object . . . Forgive me, I can

not find words to express myself . . . I beg you to allow me to withdraw, that I may hide myself from all eyes.

The Queen. Compose yourself, my fair child, calm yourself. Have I said anything to frighten you?

Carmosine. It is not fright that I feel. O merciful Heaven, you here! The queen! How could you know? . . . Minuccio has betrayed me, no doubt. . . . How can you cast your eyes upon me? . . . You hold out your hand to me, madame; do you not think that I am mad? I, the daughter of Master Bernard, to have dared to raise my eyes! . . . Do you not see that my madness is a crime, and that you should punish me for it? Ah, without doubt you see it, but you pity an unfortunate woman whose reason is shaken, and you do not wish that this poor demented creature be thrust into some dungeon, or be made an object of public scorn.

The Queen. Good heavens! Of what are you thinking?

Carmosine. Ah, I should deserve to be thus treated if I had for a moment deluded myself, if my love had been anything but a sorrow. God is my witness, God who sees all, that at the very moment when I loved, I remembered that he was the king. God knows, too, that I have tried everything to save myself from my weakness;

to drive from my memory that which is dearer than my life. Alas! madame, you know, without doubt, that no one in this world below can control the impulses of his heart, and that we do not choose what we love. But pray believe me; since you know my secret you must at least know it in its entirety. Believe me, madame, be assured, and this I pray you with clasped hands, believe me, there entered into my soul neither hope nor pride, nor the least illusion. In spite of my efforts, in spite of my reason, in spite of my very pride, I was pitilessly, miserably overwhelmed by an invincible power, which made me its plaything and its victim. No one has counted my nights, no one has seen all my tears, not even my father. Ah! never did I think that the time would come when I should ever speak of it myself. I wished, it is true, when I felt death approaching, that I might not be forced to leave without a farewell; I had not strength to carry with me to the grave this secret which was devouring me. This secret! It was my very life itself, and I sent it to him. There is my story, madame. I wished that he might know it, and that then I might die.

The Queen. Well, my dear, he does know it, for he it was who told it to me. Minuccio did not betray you.

Carmosine. What, madame, the king himself?

The Queen. Told me all. Your gratitude

was going much too far for me. It is the king who wishes you to take courage to throw off your malady, to be happy. I myself was asking you only for a little friendship.

Carmosine (*in a faint voice*). It is he who wishes me to take fresh courage?

The Queen. Yes; I repeat to you his very words.

Carmosine. His very words? And that I should have fresh courage?

The Queen. He wishes it.

Carmosine. He wishes it? And that I should be happy, was it not so?

The Queen. Yes, if we can help you to happiness.

Carmosine. And that I should marry Perillo? You were proposing that to me a moment ago, . . . for now I understand it all. . . . I was your young friend.

The Queen. Yes, you are she. And it was to you, as a friend, that I sent this ring. Did Minuccio not tell you so?

Carmosine. It was you? . . . I thank you . . . and I am ready to obey.

(*She falls upon the bench.*)

The Queen. What is wrong, my dear? Good heavens! what a pallor! You do not answer. I am going to call some one.

Carmosine. No, please do not. There is nothing wrong. Forgive me.

The Queen. I have hurt your feelings. You would make me believe that I did wrong in coming here and in speaking as I have done.

Carmosine (*rising*). Wrong in coming! Did I say that? When I have not yet been able to conceive how human kindness could inspire a generosity equal to yours! Wrong in coming, you, my sovereign, when I should speak to you only on bended knee? When, as I see you before me, I ask myself if I am not dreaming! Ah, madame! I should be worse than a thankless creature if I showed myself lacking in gratitude. What can I do to give you sufficient thanks? My only resource is to obey. He wishes me to forget him, does he not? Tell him that I forget him.

The Queen. You have but ill understood me, or I have expressed myself very wrongly. I am your queen, it is true, but if I only wished to be obeyed, child that you are, I should not have come. Will you listen to me for the last time?

Carmosine. Yes, madame. I see now that this secret, which was my sorrow and which was also my only possession, is known to all the world. The king scorns me, and I thought, indeed, that it would be so, but I was not certain. He has repeated my sad story, my ballad is sung at table before his knights and gallants. This ring did not come from him. Minuccio allowed

me to think so. Now nothing is left to me. Even my grief is not my own. Speak, madame, all that I can say is that you see me resigned to obedience or to death.

The Queen. That is exactly what we do not wish, and I am going to tell you what we wish. So listen. Yes, it is the king who wishes, first of all, that you should regain strength and that you should return to life. He it is who believes that it would be a great pity if so fair a creature should die of so plucky a love. Those were his very words. Do you call that scorn? And I it is who wish to carry you off, so that you may stay near me, that you may have a place among my maids-of-honor, who also are my good friends. And it is I who wish that, far from forgetting Don Pedro, you should see him every day. That instead of combating an affection from which you could not defend yourself, you should give way to this free impulse of your soul toward what is beautiful and generous, for such a love is elevating. It is I, Carmosine, who wish to tell you that we can love without suffering, when we love without blushing, for only shame or remorse should cause sadness, which is intended for the guilty, and certainly your thought is not such.

Carmosine. Ah, good heavens!

The Queen. Moreover, I wish for you a husband who is worthy of you; a man who is trusty, honest, and brave should give you his hand to

lead you to our palace; that he should know with me, with the whole world, the secret of your past suffering; that taking my word for it he shall believe you faithful, that taking his word for it I shall believe you happy, and that so your heart may be healed by the friendship of your queen and the esteem of your husband. . . . Listen, do we not hear the sound of a trumpet?

Carmosine. It is the king coming out of the palace.

The Queen. You know that, young maid?

Carmosine. Yes, madame, we live so near. The sound has become familiar.

The Queen. Yes, it is really the king coming, and he is coming here.

Carmosine. Is it possible.

The Queen. He is coming for both of us. Do you hear the bells, too?

Carmosine. Yes, and I see through the lattice an immense crowd going to the church. Today . . . I remember . . . is not a feast-day? How they are crowding from all directions. Ah! my dream! I see my dream!

The Queen. It is the hour of benediction.

Carmosine. Yes, at this moment the priest is at the altar and all bow before him. He turns toward the throng, he holds within his hands the image of the Saviour . . . he raises it. . . . Pardon me!

(*She kneels.*)

The Queen. Let us pray together, my child. Let us ask God what answer you will make to your king.

(*They hear again the sound of trumpets. Squires and men-at-arms stop at the gate, and the king appears shortly after.*)

Scene IX

(*The same. The King. Perillo near him. Master Bernard. Dame Pâque. Ser Vespasiano. Minuccio.*)

The King. You have a large garden here. That is very agreeable and pleasant.

Master Bernard. Yes, Sire. It is convenient and really . . .

The King. Where is your daughter?

Master Bernard. There, Sire, in front of your Majesty.

The King. Is she married?

Master Bernard. No, Sire, not yet . . . that is to say . . . if your Majesty . . .

The King (*to Carmosine*). So it is you, gentle maid, who is ill, and in danger, they say? You do not show it in the least.

Master Bernard. She was, Sire, and still is seriously ill. It is true that since this morning there is a marked improvement.

The King. I am delighted to hear it. On

my faith it would be a pity if the world were so soon robbed of so fair a child. (*To Carmosine.*) Come nearer, I pray you.

Ser Vespasiano (*to Minuccio*). Do you see what I told you? He is going to arrange the whole matter. Calatabelotte is mine.

Minuccio. Not at all, it is merely a consultation that they are going to hold in private. The Spaniards get that from the Arabs. The king is a great physician. He follows the method of Albucasis.

The King (*to Carmosine*). You are trembling, I think. Do you fear me?

Carmosine. No, Sire.

The King. Well, then, give me your hand. What does this mean, fair maid? You who are young and who are made to rejoice the heart of others, you allow yourself to feel grief? We beg you for love of us that it may please you to take courage, and that you may soon be better.

Carmosine. Sire, the cause of my suffering is my lack of strength to bear too great sorrow. Since you could pity me for it, I hope that God will deliver me from it.

The King. That is well, but it is not all. You must obey me in another respect. Has some one spoken to you about it?

Carmosine. Sire, I have been told all the goodness, all the pity, that was so kindly shown . . .

The King. Nothing else? (*To the queen.*) Is it true, Constance?

The Queen. Not altogether.

The King. Fair Carmosine, I shall speak as the king and as a friend. The great love which you have borne us has set you in great honor with us, and that which, in return, we wish to give you is to offer you from our hand, begging you to accept him, the husband whom we have chosen for you. (*He beckons to Perillo, who advances and bows.*) After which we wish always to call ourselves your knight and to wear in our tourneys your device and your colors, without asking from you in return for this promise anything but a single kiss.

The Queen (*to Carmosine*). Give it, my dear, I am not jealous.

Carmosine (*as she allows the king to kiss her brow*). Sire, the queen has answered for me.

(*The End of Carmosine.*)